

Women's Health Guide

Breast Self-Exams

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women today. Women of all ages should be giving themselves a quick examination every month to look for unusual lumps, skin changes or any sort of discharge.

All women should be familiar with their breasts. A yearly examination by your doctor is necessary for breast health, but examining yourself regularly will keep you aware at the earliest stages if something doesn't feel quite right.

According to the National Breast Cancer Association, 40 percent of diagnosed breast cancers are detected by women who feel a lump.

LOOK — IN THE MIRROR

Just looking down at your skin does not provide enough accuracy for an adequate breast exam. Consider that your view is only in one direction and will not allow you to view each section of the breast in equal measure.

Face a mirror to check for indentations or any sort of odd coloring. You should inspect your breasts by both leaning forward slightly with your hand on your hips and standing straight with your arms raised over your head.

FEEL — IN THE SHOWER

Performing a breast exam in

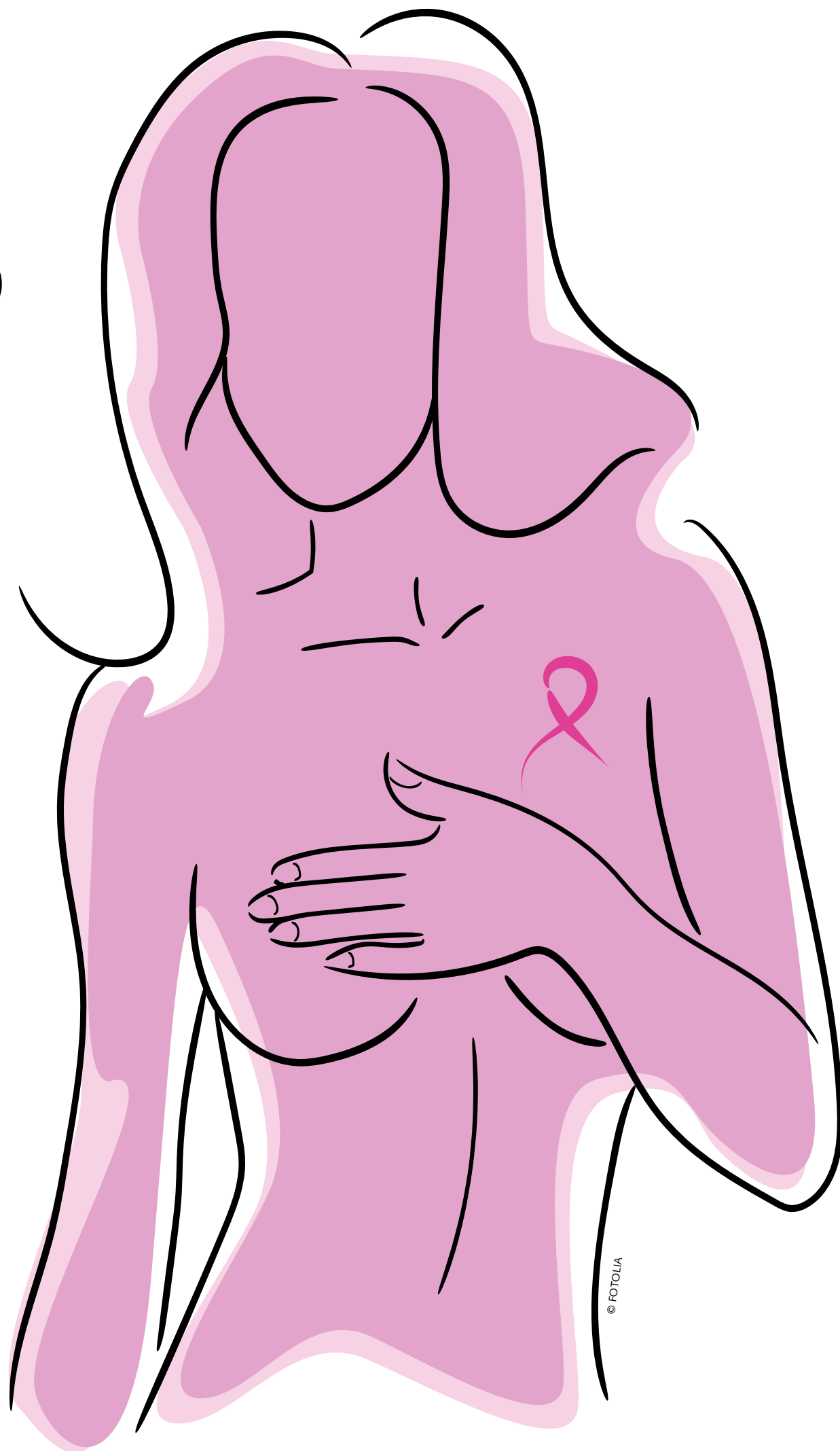
the shower allows the water to help your fingers glide over the skin more easily. Be sure to use the middle part of the fingers and not the tips to move the breast.

Be sure to move your hand both from the outside of the breast toward the nipple and then back out to the edge. Don't forget the fleshy part of the armpit, as the breast tissue extends into this area.

FEEL — LYING DOWN

It is important to check your breasts in multiple positions. In the morning before you get out of bed or after you get out of the shower are both great times to quickly feel for abnormalities.

When you are lying down, the breast tissue lays evenly along the wall of your chest. Be sure to lift your right arm straight above your head as you examine your right breast with your left hand, and then switch, raising your left arm to examine the left breast. Complete your examination using both light and firm pressure.



Reproductive Health

According to the World Health Organization, sexual and reproductive health problems comprise one-third of health issues experienced by women between the ages of 15 and 44. Staying apprised of critical information about reproductive issues is essential for achieving and maintaining reproductive health.

Hormones are key to a woman's reproductive health, as they regulate menstruation, fertility, and menopause.

AMENORRHEA AND MENOPAUSE

Amenorrhea and menopause are the most common causes of a woman's period ceasing. Menopause happens for women naturally, typically as a woman reaches age 50, when the ovaries begin to run out of viable eggs and estrogen levels drop. The process can take around five years, during which time hormones fluctuate drastically.

Amenorrhea can happen at any age but is typically seen in younger women and athletes. Those women who have a low body weight, a low percentage of body fat, are experiencing high emotional stress or perform a great deal of strenuous exercise are at higher risk.

Any woman who misses more than three periods within a year should see a doctor.

INFERTILITY AND MATERNAL HEALTH

About 10 percent of women ages 15 to 44 have difficulty getting pregnant or staying pregnant, according to the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention. That amounts to about 6.1 million women. Most cases of infertility relate to problems with ovulation.

According to the World Health Organization, almost 300,000 women died from complications during pregnancy and childbirth in 2013 alone. The major direct causes of maternal morbidity and mortality include hemorrhage, high blood pressure, infection, obstructed labor and unsafe abortion.

Many of these deaths could have been prevented, which is why regular checkups and necessary planning are essential to a healthy gestation and delivery.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

While hormones play an important role in reproductive health, it also is important to stay informed of external factors, such as sexually transmitted diseases. If you are not in a monogamous relationship in which both you and your partner have been tested, you should be diligent about getting tested for STDs often.

Remember, condoms are the only form of birth control that protects you from sexually transmitted diseases.





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Birth Control Q&A

You might have questions about the best birth control method to consider.

This is a personal issue and one you should answer with your doctor. The answer lies in what your goals are and what you expect to get out of a specific method.

If you like the thought of having daily control over your birth control or don't plan on

needing it for very long, the pill might be best. If you aren't looking to have children in the near future, and IUD might be a great option for you.

Here are some questions to ask your physician:

Can I start a new birth control pill pack if I want to skip my period?

Yes, but it works best if you are taking a monophasic pill (pills with the same hormone dose in the three weeks of

active pills). There also are newer versions of the pill designed to prevent bleeding for three months at a time.

How soon after stopping birth control can I conceive if I want to have a baby?

A majority of women will begin to ovulate two weeks after stopping the pill or the removal of an IUD, according to the Mayo Clinic. Condoms have no effect on your cycle. Depending on where you are in your ovulation cycle you

could get pregnant immediately.

Should I ever take a break from hormonal birth control?

The only reason to take a break from your birth control is because you plan on trying to conceive. In fact, hormonal birth control can come with many benefits, including reduced likelihood for endometrial cancer and decreased mood swings or feelings of anxiety.

How long should I try out a new method of birth control if the side effects are driving me crazy?

The Mayo Clinic suggests trying to hold off switching forms of birth control until you hit the 90-day mark. You should not continue if your symptoms include leg or chest pain and difficulty breathing. These can be signs of a blood clot, in which case you need to stop using the product and alert your doctor immediately.

Anxiety and Worry

The Anxiety Center defines anxiety as “a state of uneasiness, apprehension, uncertainty and fear resulting from anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation, often impairing physical and psychological functioning.”

Anxiety is felt as a mixture of emotions and physiological symptoms.

Women are more susceptible to depression and anxiety than men. According to Daniel and Jason Freeman, authors of “The Stressed Sex: Uncovering the Truth about Men, Women and Mental Health,” rates of psychological disorders are 20 percent to 40 percent higher in women than in men.

In fact, many women go about their days experiencing at least a low level of anxiety or worry.

SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

Common symptoms of anxiety include:

- Numbness;
- Dizziness;
- Headaches;
- Tension in the neck and shoulders;
- Chest pain;
- Abdominal pain;
- Nausea;
- Pulsing in the ears or temples;
- Shortness of breath;
- Heart palpitations;
- Inability to rest; and
- Inability to sleep.

Because anxiety causes stress hormones to enter the bloodstream and stress hormones affect other hormones, women can experience anxiety differently and more



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acutely than men.

Women can feel an increase in symptoms due to the hormonal changes of menstruation, pregnancy and menopause, just to name a few.

NATURAL TREATMENTS

Proven effective treatments

for anxiety include medication but also many other forms of management, such as therapy, learning coping strategies and alternative methods, such as acupuncture.

Believe it or not, proper nutrition can make a big

impact in treating anxiety. While cravings for sugar are common, too much sugar causes insulin spikes — which can destabilize your mood.

Supplements also are an option if you find through your doctor that you are deficient in calcium or other fatty

acids, as a large majority of women are. Physical activity is known to not only lower our risk of heart disease, increase bone density and aid weight loss, but also improve our mood. Yoga can train you to take deep breaths and relax the mind.

Skin Care Dos and Don'ts

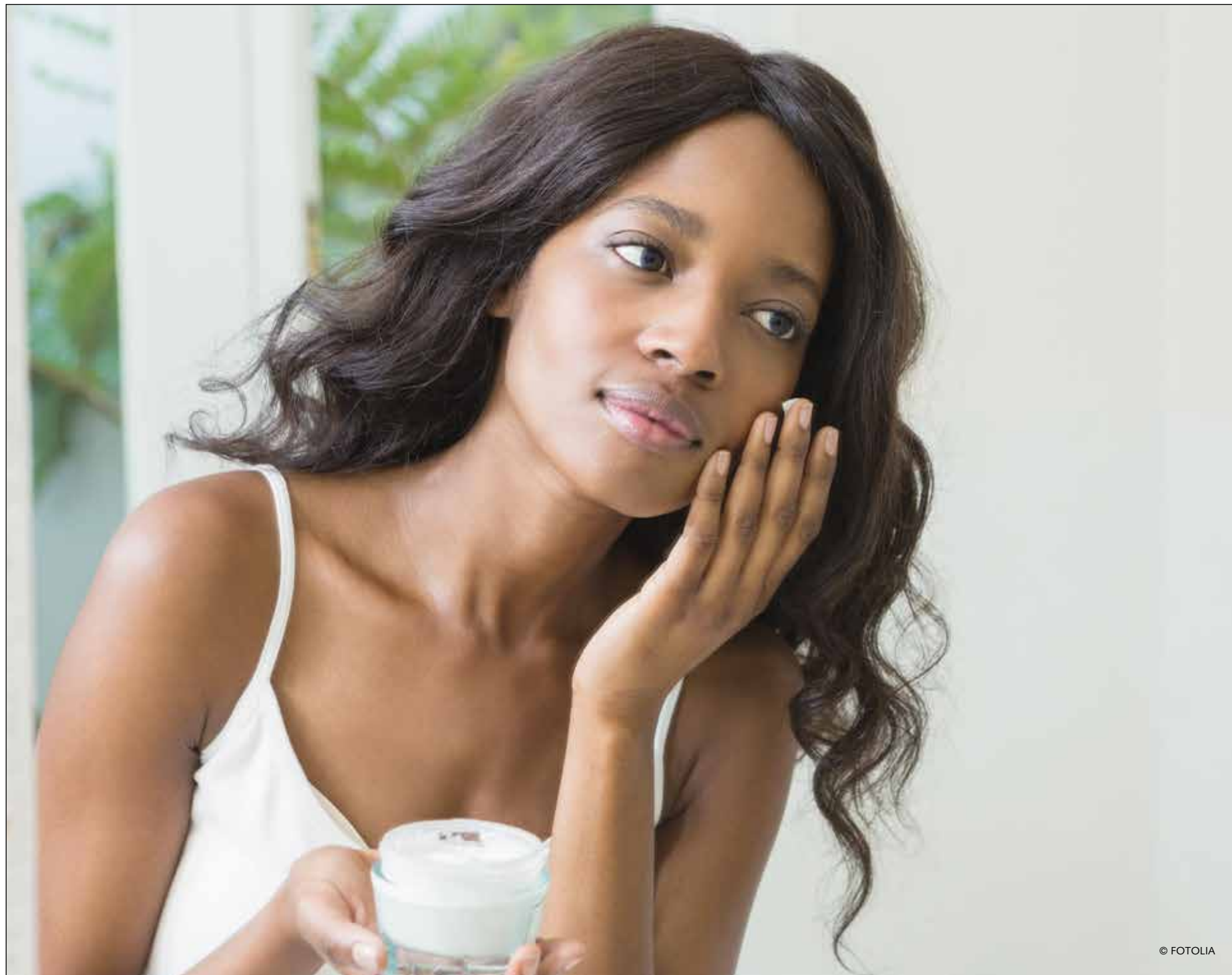
All of us wish our skin was just little bit healthier — with a bit of the ever-coveted “glow.” The secret to healthy, dewy skin, however, is not actually a secret. The answer is in what we do (or don't do) every day for ourselves.

DO moisturize day and night. You should moisturize your skin every morning after your shower or splash your face with cool water, and right before you go to bed. The moisturizer should be gentle enough for everyday use, so avoid harsh fragrances.

DON'T use too many products. There is a product out there for everything, but that doesn't mean you should use them all. Keeping your skin routine simple helps avoid breakouts, clogged pores and other skin reactions.

DO clean your makeup brushes regularly. Dirty brushes clog pores. You can clean brushes by rubbing them gently in the palm of your hand using warm water and a mild shampoo.

DO wear sunscreen every day. This means rain or shine, hot or cold. It is our daily exposure to ultraviolet rays that causes skin damage and



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leads to visible signs of aging. Choose a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a minimum SPF of 30.

DON'T touch your face. Touching your face not only causes breakouts through the transfer of dirt and oil but can

increase wrinkles and spread more serious germs, leading to a cold or the flu.

DO drink plenty of water. Dehydration leads us to look (and feel) tired. Be sure you follow the 8x8 rule and get at least eight 8-ounce glasses of

water every day. If drinking water is hard for you, consider infusing it with fruit or veggies, such as lemon and cucumber, mint and raspberry or refreshing watermelon.

DO watch what you eat. This does not mean you need

to stick to a stringent diet but be conscious of what you are eating. Omega-3 fatty acids are great for helping your skin retain moisture and are found in high doses in fish, spinach, walnuts, soybeans and chia seeds.

Numbers to Know

- 36 percent of women 20 years of age or older are considered obese.

- This is in part due to the fact that only 45 percent of women 18 years or older met the federal physical activity guidelines for aerobic activity in 2015.

- Almost 67 percent of all women 40 years and older received a mammogram in the last two years.

- More than 15 million mammograms were ordered by physicians in 2013 alone.

- The good news is that the United States is experiencing the lowest number of women without some sort of health coverage in five years, at 9.2 percent.

- While almost 90 percent of women in the United States have some measure of health coverage, according to the CDC, the National Pain Report asserts that 90 percent of women who experience chronic pain believe the healthcare system either dismisses or discriminates against them.

TARGET NUMBERS

The easiest way to stay healthy is to be an advocate for your own health. Here are the healthy ranges of some of the most common health measures:

Blood pressure: 120/80 or lower is where you need to be. Blood pressure is a measure of how hard your blood is pushing against your arterial walls. If it's too high, you risk damaging your blood vessels,

causing them to weaken over time.

Cholesterol: You should aim to keep your LDL cholesterol below 100 mg/dL and your HDL cholesterol above

50 mg/dL, according to the American Heart Association. High cholesterol can lead to plaque buildup in arteries, which can contribute to heart attack or stroke.

Heart rate and exercise: A healthy pulse for a 40-year-old woman is 85 to 145 beats per minute. You should be completing at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise or physical

activity per week, according to the World Health Organization. Hitting this target lowers the risk for heart disease, diabetes, stroke and several types of cancer.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continually surveys, measures and collects data from the U.S. population to ascertain the health of the nation. Here are some of their most relevant statistics behind women's health.



Violence Against Women

At least 35 percent of women across the globe have been victims of domestic violence, according to the World Health Organization.

Domestic violence does not only cause physical and emotional harm directly from the abuse, but it puts victims at higher risk for depression, suicide, STDs and unintended pregnancy.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is one of the most pressing global human rights issues and includes any sort of sexual advancement that is unwanted.

According to a report published by the United Nations, 70 percent of women experience violence in their lifetime, and millions of women are victims of sexual violence every year. However, these numbers are considered an inaccurate portrayal because sexual crimes are frequently under-reported.

HOW TO HELP

If someone ever confides in you about a domestic violence issue, it is up to you to listen without judgment and let them know you are on their side. Always believe what they



are telling you and ask how you can help your friend get through the situation.

Being available is key. Be ready to lend a hand — whether it be financially or emotionally — if someone you know is thinking about leaving or is in fear that violence against them will escalate.

GET INVOLVED

There are many organizations working tirelessly to end abuse toward women. Find one you care about and volunteer. Below are a few to consider.

RAINN: An organization committed to providing support and counseling for sexual assault victims in the

United States.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Aims to be the voice of victims and survivors of domestic violence by influencing public policy, providing programming and increasing awareness of the impacts of domestic violence.

End Violence Against

Women International: An organization that works with professionals in the criminal justice system to help victims receive favorable outcomes and accountability for their assailants.

Nobel Women's Initiative: A group working tirelessly to fight against sexual violence abroad.