

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women and men actually produce the same hormones, but the levels of the hormones oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone differ significantly. Women undergo hormonal ups and downs on a monthly basis, whereas the level of a man's hormones is fairly constant until he reaches his fifties. At certain stages of her life, a woman will also experience big shifts in hormone levels, notably at puberty, during and after pregnancy, and at menopause. Health differences can be put down to social, emotional, environmental, lifestyle, hormonal and genetic factors.



HEART DISEASE

We often associate heart disease and heart attacks with middle aged or older men. But in fact, heart disease kills almost as many women as men and is the single biggest killer of Australian women. Surprisingly, Australian women are at five times the risk of dying from coronary heart disease than from breast cancer. Although increasing age is a risk factor, women of all ages should be concerned about heart disease and should take steps to prevent heart disease. Heart disease often has no symptoms, but there are some signs to watch for:

- Chest or arm pain or discomfort
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Abnormal heartbeats
- Feeling very tired

The failure to recognize the symptoms results in a delay to receive treatment. The average delay for a man is about 45 minutes to an hour, while the average wait for women is four to eight days! Talk with your doctor if you're having any of these symptoms.

Risk factors

There are two types of heart disease risk factors – those you can't control (non-modifiable) and those you are able to alter (modifiable):

Non-Modifiable	Modifiable	
Increasing Age	High Blood Pressure	Smoking
Gender	High Cholesterol	Diabetes
Family History of Early Death from Heart Disease	Physical Inactivity	Depression and Social Isolation
Personal History of Heart Disease	Being Overweight	

MENOPAUSE

Menopause, also known as 'the change of life', marks the end of the monthly cycle of menstruation in a woman's life. It is a natural occurrence and marks the end of the reproductive years, just as the first menstrual period during puberty marked the start. Menopause may be part of a number of adjustments that women experience at midlife. Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 48 and 55, among Australian women, the average age is about 51 to 52 years. For some women however, menopause may occur at an earlier age. Early menopause (also known as premature menopause) affects almost 10% of women under the age of 40, with some being diagnosed in their twenties, or even their late teens. Surgical menopause is when the ovaries are removed at surgery prior to natural menopause, (also known as oophorectomy).



MENOPAUSE

What are the Common Symptoms of Menopause?

Unpleasant symptoms of menopause can often be reduced by improving your lifestyle with a healthy diet and regular exercise. The most common symptom is the hot flush; however women may sometimes experience several of the symptoms listed below:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Aches and pains
- Forgetfulness
- Urinary frequency
- Lack of self esteem
- Crawling or itching sensations under the skin
- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Vaginal dryness
- Reduced libido
- Tiredness
- Irritability
- Depression

OVARIAN CANCER

Each year in Australia around 1300 women are diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Although ovarian cancer can occur at any age, approximately 80% of cases occur in women aged 50 years and over, and it is the 9th most common cancer in women. Ovarian cancer is difficult to diagnose at an early stage because there may not be any obvious symptoms and when symptoms do occur they are often vague. Unfortunately this means that over 70% of women are diagnosed at an advanced stage, where the cancer has spread and is very difficult to treat successfully. A pap smear cannot be used to detect ovarian cancer. There is currently no known means of prevention, so early detection is vital. Blood tests and ultrasounds can be used to detect for cancer.

The most Common Symptoms that may indicate Ovarian Cancer are:

- Abdominal bloating
- Feeling full after eating small amounts
- Unexplained weight gain or loss
- Urinary frequency
- Abdominal/pelvic pain
- Constipation
- Heartburn
- Back pain
- Excessive fatigue

Speak to your doctor if you are concerned about any of these health conditions.

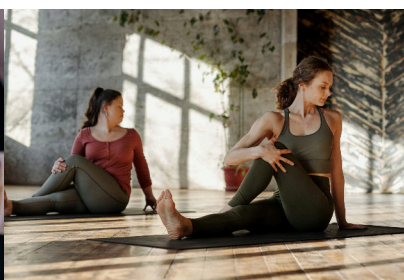
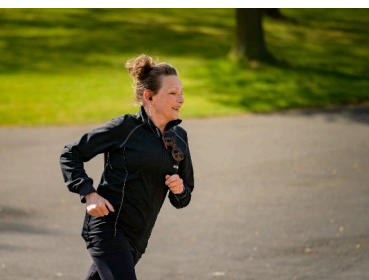
For further information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au; www.jeanhailes.org.au; or www.heartfoundation.org.au

BREAST CANCER

One in nine women in Australia will develop breast cancer before the age of 85 years. There are many breast diseases and conditions in addition to breast cancer that women need to be aware of. At various times during any month, a woman's breasts can change and may feel lumpy. Common breast changes fall into several broad categories, including generalised breast changes, solitary lumps, nipple discharge and infection and/or inflammation. It is important to see your doctor if you notice any changes to your breasts, and have regular screenings from the age of 50. Increasing age is one of the strongest risk factors. For a woman in her 30's, the risk is approximately 1 in 250, while the risk for a woman in her 70's is approximately 1 in 30.

Things to Consider:

- **Having a baby before the age of 30** and breastfeeding for a total of 12 months or more can reduce a woman's risk of breast cancer
- **Eat for health** - Choose a varied diet with plenty of vegetables and fruit
- **Exercise** - Regular moderate to brisk physical activity of between 1.5 to 4 hours a week has been shown to reduce risk for breast cancer
- **Body weight** – Maintain a healthy body weight throughout your life. When you lower your body fat, you reduce the level of cancer-promoting hormones
- **Alcohol** - Drinking alcohol increases your risk for breast cancer. Keeping your alcohol consumption down to no more than 2 standard drinks a day with 2 alcohol free days a week is recommended
- **Hormone replacement therapy** - If you are taking combined hormone replacement therapy (HRT), review your needs every 6 to 12 months in consultation with your doctor



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