

When calcium levels become low in the body, as may occur during pregnancy, the body releases the calcium stored in bone, and as a result, bone tissue decreases. Thus, if one has enough calcium and a sufficient bone mass, loss of bone mass after menopause will not greatly affect her overall bone density. Smoking, lack of exercise, and a family history of osteoporosis can increase your chances of developing the disease.

The **BMD (bone mineral density) test** is used to measure your bone density through the use of a scanner. This test may be offered at your doctor's office or at a local drug store.

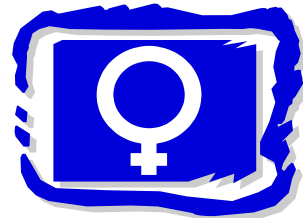
It is never too late to begin preventing osteoporosis.

Women, young and old, should be sure to consume at least 1500mg of calcium daily. Foods high in calcium consist of milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, broccoli, green leafy vegetables, as well as foods that have been enriched with calcium. One can also take calcium supplements to ensure adequate calcium levels, especially during pregnancy. Do not underestimate the importance of exercising as well. In addition to hormone-replacement therapy (an option for women who have reached menopause), there are bone-building drugs that can help strengthen bones to reduce the effects of osteoporosis. It is essential for women to form as much bone tissue as possible before reaching old age.

By following these simple guidelines now, you can avoid the painful experience of osteoporosis in the future, insha'Allah.



Women's Health: Taking Good Care of Yourself



As humans, we are given our bodies as trusts to be taken care of from the time that we are born until our death. For this reason, men and women are obligated to give their bodies their due rights: food, drink, sensual pleasure, and proper care as a form of obedience to Allah. There are several ways in which a woman can take good care of her body in order to preserve her health as well as prevent diseases. They may involve self-examinations, regular check-ups at the doctor's office, and maintaining a proper diet and lifestyle. This brochure informs you about some simple ways to maintain good health throughout your lifetime.



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Avoiding Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer to affect women after skin cancer, killing more than 40,000 women annually. In order to catch and treat the disease in its early stages women should perform a self-breast exam monthly and schedule a yearly breast exam at the doctor's office. Women age 40 and above must schedule a mammography annually as well. Although some people may say that such breast exams are not very accurate and do not necessarily detect cancer in the breast, it is known that currently, half of all cases of breast cancer are caught in the early stages. Without these examinations, the disease would go unnoticed until it is too late.

The Clinical Breast Exam

During a clinical breast exam the practitioner checks for nipple inversion, dimpling of the skin, suspicious lumps, or other distortions. You will be asked to lie down and lift your arms above your head, pressing your palms together to contract the chest muscles, making abnormalities more pronounced. The examiner will then manually examine your breasts and underarms using a circular motion. If abnormal lumps are found, further testing will be done to determine if there is a problem.

The Mammogram

Mammography, a low dose x-ray, is considered the most effective method for detecting breast cancer and should be taken once every year for women over age 40. However, women with a family history of the disease should ask their doctor about beginning testing earlier. For the exam you must not wear any powder, cream, or deodorant. During the fifteen to twenty minute procedure, you will remove all clothing and jewelry from the waist up. The breasts will be pressed between glass plates, and X-rays will be taken. Since the exam can be uncomfortable, be sure not to test the week before your period, when your breasts will be tender and sensitive. You can also take a pain reliever one hour before the exam to help with the soreness. The X-ray is studied for abnormalities, which may be either malignant (cancerous) tumors or benign (non-cancerous). A biopsy can verify the results if needed.

The Self Breast Exam

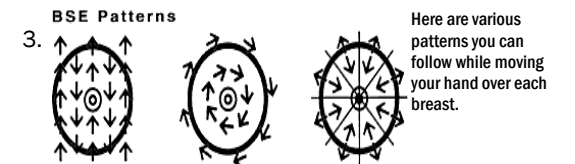
The self-breast exam should be done monthly by women ages 20 and above. Studies have shown that women who conduct self breast exams find growths that are much smaller and less advanced than those found in women who do not. The exam is quick, easy, and useful for detecting the disease, so why not get into the habit of doing it?

It is best to examine your breasts at the same time each month, such as one week after your period begins.

Here's how:

1. Look at your breasts in front of a mirror, first with your arms at your sides, then raised over your head, and then with hands pressed on your hips while flexing your chest muscles.

2. In the shower, move your fingers over your breast, while keeping them flat. Move them in a circular motion, moving closer to the nipple with each circle. While you are circling your fingers around the nipple, gently press down on the breast every inch or so, to feel for abnormalities. Be sure to feel under the arm as well.



3. Lie down, placing a small pillow underneath the shoulder near the breast to be examined. Put the hand belonging to that side under your head. With the other hand, examine the breast in the same circular motion as mentioned in step three. Be sure to examine both breasts. Be sure to feel your underarm area as well.

4. Squeeze each nipple gently to check for discharge.

5. Call your doctor if you experience any of the following: discharge, finding a lump or thick-feeling area in the breast or underarm that does not move when touched, is hard, has irregular borders, is not the same in both breasts, or stays the same size throughout your menstrual cycle.

Do not be alarmed as most lumps are not cancerous. However, the doctor must be alerted in order to determine the nature of your lumps.

It is your responsibility to take care of your health, and by performing these three easy breast exams you can be saving your life.

Staying Healthy

The best way to be sure your body is healthy is by scheduling a complete check-up with your doctor once every year. Among the exams that you should request to be performed are the pelvic, skin, breast, colon, blood, and bone mineral density exams.

Pelvic and Pap Exams

In the year 2000, it was predicted that nearly 12,800 women would be diagnosed with invasive cervical cancer, a potentially deadly disease if not detected early. You can prevent death by cervical cancer simply by scheduling regular pap smears. Pelvic and pap exams are useful in detecting cervical cancer as well as precancerous cells and should be done yearly if you are above the age of 18 or are sexually active.

During the **pelvic exam**, you will lie on the examination table with the knees bent and the feet placed in stirrups. The doctor or practitioner will feel your pelvic organs from the inside and outside to inspect the shape and size of the ovaries and uterus. A speculum is used to look inside the vagina. During this exam, the **pap exam** is done by using a cotton swab to gently scrape cells from the cervix in order to be smeared on a slide and studied under a microscope to detect any indications of cancer. Before having a pelvic exam, be sure your bladder is empty. Schedule both exams regularly to catch these diseases before they become harmful.

Skin Exam

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., and its incidence is on the rise. To detect this type of cancer you are encouraged to get an annual skin test, which consists of a visual inspection of the moles on your body. The following are characteristics of potentially cancerous moles:

- ▶ uneven borders
- ▶ more than one color
- ▶ an asymmetrical shape
- ▶ a diameter larger than a pencil eraser
- ▶ any change in appearance.

Suspicious moles will be easily removed by a physician and tested in a lab for malignancy (to see if they are cancerous). This test is crucial, since skin cancer can spread quickly.

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends a monthly skin exam, especially for those who have numerous freckles and moles. You will need a bright light and mirror to observe your skin. To inspect your scalp use a blow dryer to blow the hair out of the way. Do not forget to examine your back, feet, and genital area, which can be done using a hand held mirror. Check for any of the suspicious characteristics listed above. If you find any abnormalities, consult your doctor as soon as possible.

Colorectal Cancer Test

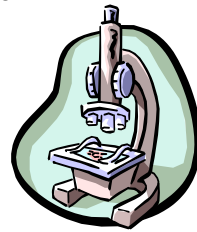
Colorectal cancer is a common and dangerous disease, having claimed over 56,000 deaths this year. You can prevent colorectal cancer death by getting screened regularly for this disease. Several methods are used to detect this cancer early on before symptoms appear. Treatment of this disease is most effective when detected early.

Fecal Occult Blood Test

This test, which should be performed yearly for men and women ages 50 and above, looks for hidden blood in the stool. Before collecting stool samples your doctor will instruct you to eat a very strict diet. You will either be asked to collect stool samples for three consecutive days, or the doctor will collect one during a rectal exam. Samples are smeared on cards and tested for the presence of blood. Also recommended every 3-5 years after age 50 is the **flexible sigmoidoscopy**, a test in which the doctor inserts a tube through the rectum to look for suspicious growths in the colon.

Blood Tests

By simply taking a blood sample, several tests can be done to determine various aspects of your health such as



your levels of cholesterol, glucose, and thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), a hormone responsible for the body's metabolism.

Thyroid Disease

Some women, especially those above age 50, may experience fatigue, sensitivity to cold, weight gain, and an overall slowing of bodily functions, all of which can be related to hypothyroidism. This is where the thyroid gland produces too little of the thyroid hormones. Hyperthyroidism, on the other hand, is a condition in which too much thyroid hormone is released, causing rapid heartbeats, weight loss, dizziness, and other symptoms. By analyzing the test results taken from your blood sample, your doctor can determine whether or not your hormone levels are normal, and he/she may prescribe medications to regulate these levels.

Diabetes Test

The glucose test is a simple test performed on a blood sample and is used to detect Type II (adult onset) diabetes. This disease afflicts 16 million people living in America, half of whom are not even aware that they have it. If left untreated, this condition can cause serious problems including blindness, kidney and heart disease, nerve damage, and stroke. By testing for abnormal glucose levels (abnormal levels are 126 mg/dl or above), your doctor can develop a program of diet, exercise, and/or medication to control your blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of complications caused by diabetes. Besides having a regular glucose test every three years, you can make health decisions that will prevent the onset of this disease. Exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight, and avoid foods high in sugar, cholesterol, and fat. Your role is crucial in protecting your body against the onset of this dangerous condition.

Cholesterol

Hypercholesterolemia, or a high blood cholesterol level, is a major risk factor for heart attacks. As the amount of cholesterol in the body increases, it builds up in the blood rather than being processed and removed by the liver. Cholesterol that remains in the blood will undergo a chemical reaction and will begin forming a plaque in the artery. This plaque continues to grow until the artery is blocked, and severe damage can occur, such as a heart attack. In order to protect themselves against this, adults ages twenty and above are instructed to measure their cholesterol levels every three to five years. The test is simple and only requires that a blood sample be drawn and analyzed. The following is a guide for interpreting cholesterol levels:

- Desirable: less than 200
- Borderline high: 200 to 239
- High: 240 or greater

There are two types of cholesterol that are measured: HDL and LDL.

HDL, high density lipoproteins, are called "good" cholesterol because they cause cholesterol to be removed from the body. The higher your HDL level, the better.

LDL, or low-density lipoprotein, carries cholesterol from the liver to the bloodstream. If LDL's remain in the blood, fat and cholesterol will build up until the arteries become blocked. It is best to keep your LDL levels as low as possible.

In order to maintain desirable HDL and LDL levels, it is necessary that you exercise regularly, eat foods that are low in fat and cholesterol and high in fiber, and avoid smoking. If your cholesterol levels do not change after making these necessary changes, a doctor may need to prescribe medication for you.

Blood Pressure

High blood pressure, also known as hypertension, is a condition that increases the risk for stroke, heart disease, and liver and kidney damage. Hypertension is the most common chronic condition in older women and is thought to cause over 200,000 deaths per year in America. Although it has no symptoms, it can damage the heart, blood vessels, kidneys, and eyes in its advanced stages. You must get your blood pressure checked at least every two years. However, if you have any of the following factors, which increase your risk of developing high blood pressure, then you should check your blood pressure more frequently.

- Family history of hypertension, stroke, heart attack, or kidney failure
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Stress
- High salt and fat diet
- Lack of exercise
- Use of high dose birth control pills
- Heavy drinking of alcoholic beverages
- Diabetes

High blood pressure is not a permanent condition. Studies have shown that blood pressure can be returned to normal levels by simply losing weight, exercising, and eating a healthy diet. These three life-style adjustments are actually safer and at times more effective than the use of medications.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis affects more than 25 million Americans—mostly women. It occurs when the bones begin to weaken as a result of loss of bone tissue. In the advanced stages of the disease, women will experience the pain of broken bones, and they may also decrease in height. Although its onset begins at menopause, its prevention begins decades before.

The best way to prevent osteoporosis is to have an adequate daily calcium intake and to exercise regularly. Calcium is deposited in bone and is essential for the lying down of bone tissue.