



Women's health is an important part of the overall wellness of the defense community. While women and men have many of the same health issues, women may be affected differently than men. In addition, there are some conditions which are unique to women. Familiarity with women's health issues, regular screenings and prevention are keys to maintaining good health.



Some of the common health issues female service members, family members and retirees should be aware of include breast diseases, menopause, pregnancy, reproductive health, uterine diseases and sexual related health issues.

Breast Diseases

Most women experience breast changes at some time. Age, hormone levels and medicines may cause lumps, bumps and discharges. Anyone with a breast lump, pain, discharge or skin irritation, should see a health care provider. Minor and serious breast problems have similar symptoms. Although many women fear cancer, most breast problems are not cancer.

Common causes of breast changes:

- *Fibrocystic breast condition* - lumpiness, thickening and swelling, often associated with a woman's period
- *Cysts* - fluid-filled lumps
- *Injury*
- *Fibroadenomas* - solid, round, rubbery lumps that move easily when pushed, occurring most in younger women
- *Intraductal papillomas* - growths similar to warts near the nipple
- Blocked or clogged milk ducts
- Milk production when a woman is not breastfeeding

Heart Health

Although heart disease is not gender specific, women may experience symptoms in a different manner from men.

The most common cause of heart disease is narrowing or blockage of the coronary arteries, the blood vessels that supply blood to the heart itself. This is called coronary artery disease and happens slowly over time. It's the major reason people have heart attacks. Prevention is important: two-thirds of women who have a heart attack fail to make a full recovery.

Women also tend to be about 10 years older than men when they have a heart attack. They are also more likely to have other conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and congestive heart failure - making it all the more vital to get proper treatment quickly.

The older a woman gets, the more likely she is to get heart disease. But women of all ages should be concerned about heart disease. All women can take steps to prevent it by practicing healthy lifestyle habits and learning about symptoms to watch out for.

Heart attack symptoms in women often differ from those in men. As with men, women's most common heart attack symptom is chest pain or discomfort. However, women are more likely than men to experience some of the other common symptoms which are:

- Pain or discomfort in the center of the chest
- Pain or discomfort in other areas of the upper body, including the arms, back, neck, jaw or stomach
- Other symptoms, such as shortness of breath, breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or light-headedness

Heart disease is the number one killer of women in the United States. It is also a leading cause of disability among women.

Menopause

Menopause is the time in a woman's life when her menstrual cycle ceases. It usually occurs naturally, most often after age 45. Menopause happens because the woman's ovary stops producing the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

A woman has reached menopause when she has not had a period for one year. Changes and symptoms can start several years earlier. They include:

- A change in periods - shorter or longer, lighter or heavier, with more or less time in between
- Hot flashes and/or night sweats
- Trouble sleeping
- Vaginal dryness
- Mood swings
- Trouble focusing
- Less hair on head, more on face

Some symptoms require treatment. Talk to a doctor about how to best manage menopause. Make sure the doctor knows the medical history and the family's medical history. This includes information related to risks for heart disease, osteoporosis or breast cancer.

Pregnancy

Women who are pregnant or are planning to get pregnant can help give babies a healthy start with regular visits to healthcare providers. These prenatal care visits are very important for your baby and yourself. Some things you might do when you are pregnant could hurt your baby, such as smoking or drinking. Some medicines can also be a problem, even ones that a doctor prescribed. You will need to drink plenty of fluids and eat a healthy diet. You may also be tired and need more rest.

Your body will change as your baby grows during the nine months of your pregnancy. Don't hesitate to call your health care provider if you think you have a problem or something is bothering or worrying you.

Reproductive Health

Reproductive health issues can impact fertility, overall health and a person's ability to enjoy a sexual relationship.

Reproductive health is influenced by many factors. These include age, lifestyle, habits, genetics, use of medicines and exposure to chemicals in the environment. Many problems of the reproductive system can be corrected.

Uterine Diseases

An early sign of uterine disease may be bleeding between periods or after sex. Causes of abnormal bleeding include hormones, thyroid problems, fibroids, polyps, cancer, infection or pregnancy.

Treatment depends on the cause. Sometimes birth control pills treat hormonal imbalances. If a thyroid problem is the cause, treating it may also stop the bleeding. If you have cancer or hyperplasia, an overgrowth of normal cells in the uterus, you may need surgery.

Other uterine problems are endometriosis and adenomyosis. In endometriosis, the kind of tissue that lines the uterus grows outside the uterus. With adenomyosis, the tissue grows in the uterus's outer walls. Pain medicine may help; other treatments include hormones and surgery.

These problems may have physical or psychological causes. Physical causes may include conditions like diabetes, heart disease, nerve disorders or hormone problems. Some drugs can also affect desire and function. Psychological causes may include work-related stress and anxiety. They may also include depression or concerns about marriage or relationship problems. For some women, the problem results from past sexual trauma.

Occasional problems with sexual function are common. If problems last more than a few months or cause distress for you or your partner, see your healthcare provider.

Regular health exams and tests can help find problems before they start. They also can help detect problems early, increasing the success of treatment. As a woman, some special exams and screenings are necessary.

Sexual Problems in Women

There are many problems that can keep a woman from enjoying sex. They include:

- Lack of sexual desire
- Inability to become aroused
- Lack of orgasm, or sexual climax
- Painful intercourse

A woman's wellness exam will usually include:

- *A pelvic exam* — an exam to check if internal female organs are normal by feeling their shape and size.
- *A Pap test* — a test to check for cancer of the cervix, the opening to a woman's uterus. Cells from the cervix are prepared so they can be seen under a microscope.
- *A clinical breast exam* — to check for breast cancer by feeling and looking at your breasts.

Health care providers may also recommend other tests, including a mammogram or a test for HPV.

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/womenshealth.html>



TRICARE

<http://tricare.mil/mybenefit/jsp/Medical/IsItCovered.do?topic=Women>

Army Medicine: Women's Health Tips

<http://www.armymedicine.army.mil/hc/healthtips/ht.cfm?id=12>

Navy & Marine Corps Public Health Center

http://www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil/Healthy_Living/Sexual_Health/sharp_navy_women.aspx

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Women's Health Resources

<http://www.cdc.gov/Women/>

Hooah 4 Health Women's Health Resources

<http://www.hooah4health.com/prevention/whealth/default.htm>

WomensHealth.gov

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/>