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Women's Health Week is May 10-16

Top Health Concerns for Women

by KenMcEntee

Prevention and early detection is key to avoiding and treating most health problems. That's why Kelly Becker, D.O., a family practice physician with the Southwest General Medical Group, Inc., suggests that women visit their physicians at least once a year to get routine tests and screenings for early detection of breast and cervical cancer and cardiac conditions, like high cholesterol.

"Regular visits to the doctor for routine checkups and health screenings will help women of all ages keep on top of their health," Dr. Becker advises. "Many women, especially mothers, are so focused on the health of their families that they often neglect their own health issues. Good health maintenance should start young and continue throughout your life."

In recognition of Women's Health Week, May 10-16, Dr. Becker

discussed some of today's top health concerns for women:

• **Cervical cancer.** About 70 percent of all cervical cancer cases are related to two types of the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus (HPV). That's why Dr. Becker recommends the HPV vaccination for females well before they become sexually active. Females can be vaccinated as early as age nine, and vaccinations are mandatory in a growing number of states.

"When the vaccine first came out, some parents were concerned that it promoted promiscuity," Dr. Becker says. "People now have a better understanding that since this is an effective way to prevent cervical cancer, it's best to be protected as early as possible. Abstinence is the best way to avoid a lot of problems, but that isn't always going to happen."

She notes that because the vaccine isn't effective against all causes of cervical cancer, women should continue to get annual pap tests.

"Women should begin to have pap tests and pelvic examinations at the age of 21, or when they become sexually active," she advises.

• **Breast cancer.** Four important things to remember are: know your family history; do monthly self-exams; have an annual mammogram; and visit with your physician annually for a clinical breast exam, Dr. Becker advises. She says women should begin annual breast cancer screenings at age 35, or earlier, if there is a family history of breast cancer.

"Use your mother, maternal grandmother and aunts as a guide," she says. "If they had breast cancer, you should begin to get tested at the age at which they were diagnosed."

"All women over the age of 21 should perform monthly self exams. Your doctor will show you the proper ways to do it and what to look for. The main point is to know your own body so that you can detect changes."

And, she insists, don't be afraid to call your doctor if you think you may have detected something unusual.

"Hopefully, it is nothing, but if you are concerned, don't hesitate to call," Dr. Becker says. "It's better to be safe, than sorry, with any women's health issue."

• **Weight problems.** Being overweight is the most common complaint expressed by Dr. Becker's patients.

"Usually they are mostly concerned with their physical appearance, but being overweight is a risk factor for many health issues such as diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart problems," she says.

It is normal for a woman's metabolism to slow down when she gets into her thirties. That means it's harder to lose those extra pounds.

"A lot of mothers think that chasing their kids around all day is a lot of exercise, but it isn't enough," Dr. Becker laughs. "The first thing I recommend is to eat a proper diet and get a lot of exercise. If that doesn't help, I suggest getting tested to rule out a thyroid condition or any other health problem."

Dr. Becker says you should talk to your doctor before you try any over-the-counter weight loss product and cautions against on-and-off dieting that results in significant fluctuations in your weight.

"The yo-yoing up and down is very bad for your heart," she warns.

• **Cardiac health.** Along with breast

cancer, heart problems are the leading cause of death in women over the age of 50.

"Proper diet and plenty of aerobic activity is important for your overall health, and particularly important for the health of your heart," Dr. Becker says.

She suggests annual cholesterol screenings begin when women reach their thirties. For families with a history of heart problems, it's a good idea for children to be tested as early as four- to six-years-old, with another screening in their teenage years.

"Estrogen protects women from heart problems, but as they approach menopause, they lose their estrogen protection and run the same risk as men," Dr. Becker says.

• **Menopausal issues.** Women who are approaching menopause may experience many symptoms similar to when they were beginning puberty – irregular periods, excessive bleeding and intense cramping, along with hot flashes. As women begin to experience signs of menopause, a visit to the doctor can provide reassurance that what they are going through is normal and, if necessary, they can get treatment to alleviate the symptoms.

"Your physician can suggest vitamins or herbal treatments or, as a last resort, can do hormone replacement therapy," Dr. Becker says. "And because of the reduction of estrogen, a cardio exam including an EKG, should be done."

• **Bladder issues.** According to Dr. Becker, bladder issues are among the most prominent concerns women have. Issues range from an over-reactive bladder that results in urgent dashes to the restroom, to leaking during a sneeze or a cough.

"It's embarrassing, so many women don't talk about it," Dr. Becker says. "They don't realize how common it is. If you are having bladder issues, don't hesitate to talk to your doctor about it."

Dr. Kelly Becker, a graduate of Strongsville High School and Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine, is located at the Southwest General Medical Group, Inc. Family Practice office at 18181 Pearl Road, Suite B-202, in Strongsville. To make an appointment, call 440-816-5050.

did you know?

Attend the Women's Health Fair

Hosted by *Southwest General's Woman's Center of Excellence* on Wednesday, **May 13, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

Join us for a fun and informative day that can improve your physical and mental health and lower your risks of certain diseases. The Women's Health Fair will be held in the walkway between the south parking lot and Main Lobby at Southwest General. Refreshments will be served, and there will be a basket raffle to benefit the hospital's Health Information Resource Center.

Get information on family life services, OB services and tours, breast cancer, osteoporosis, safety tip for women, domestic violence and more. Additionally, participate in one of our free screenings including blood pressure, diabetes, bone density and body fat.

Southwest General is located at 18697 Bagley Road, in Middleburg Heights.