

Chronic Health Problems

Questions to Ask Yourself

- Do you know the difference between a chronic and an acute health problem?
 - Chronic: can be severe or mild, but is long term (ex: asthma, diabetes, obesity)
 - Acute: can also be severe or mild, but is short term (ex: a cold, the flu)
- How does your chronic health problem make you feel?
- What aspects of your chronic health problem or its treatment are hard to deal with?
- Do you currently do anything to alleviate the symptoms of your illness?
- (Non-CHP sufferer) Do you know how you can prevent a chronic health problem?

Preventing Chronic Health Problems

Some chronic health problems are caused by uncontrollable factors like genetics. However, many others can be prevented by living a healthy and active lifestyle. There are many screening tests available to catch chronic health problems early, which prevent early death and decrease health care costs.

Major Chronic Health Problems in America

- **Heart Disease** – the leading cause of death in the U.S. and of women
- **Cancer** – the second leading cause of death
- **Stroke** – the third leading cause of death
- **Diabetes** – the sixth leading cause of death. 1 in 3 Americans born in 2000 will develop this disease in their lifetime

Chronic Health Problems: Causes and Prevention

Behavior	Increases Risk For	Prevention Strategies
Smoking	Cancer, heart disease	QUIT! Don't just cut down.
No Exercise	Overweight, weak bones, diabetes, high blood pressure	20–30 min of exercise daily
Poor Nutrition	Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke	More fruit and vegetables, plenty of fiber, water More fruit and vegetables, plenty of fiber, water
Overweight/obesity	Heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, cancer	Move more, eat less, find help and support
High Blood Pressure	Heart disease, stroke	Regularly check blood pressure, take medication, reduce stress, eat healthy
High Blood Cholesterol	Heart disease, stroke	Check cholesterol, eat healthy, take medication
Lack of Mammography	Later stages of breast cancer	At 40, get screened every 1–2 years. Medicaid pays for this
Lack of colon screening	Later stages of colorectal cancer	At 50, talk to doctor about screening

Lack of health care coverage	Poor health	Apply today, check for Medicaid eligibility
------------------------------	-------------	---

Remember these healthy habits to reduce your risk for developing chronic health problems:

- Maintain a healthy diet with lots of fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy
- Reduce salt intake
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Do 30 minutes of physical activity every day
- Quit smoking
- Monitor your blood pressure by knowing your numbers and what they mean
- Take all prescribed medication as recommended by your doctor
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Visit your medical professionals regularly

Chronic Health Problems Questionnaire

- Do you know if you've ever been diagnosed with a chronic disease? If so, which one?
- About how much do you weigh without shoes on?
- About how tall are you without shoes on?
- Has a health care professional ever told you that you have high blood pressure?
- Has a health care professional ever told you that you have high blood cholesterol?
- Has a health care professional ever told you that you have diabetes?
- Has a health care professional ever told you that you have arthritis?
- Have you smoked at least 100 cigarettes in your entire life?
- Do you smoke cigarettes every day, some days or not at all? Has that always been the case?
- During the last month, other than your regular job, did you participate in any physical activities or exercises such as running, sports, gardening or walking for exercise?
- Not counting juice, how often do you eat fruit?
- How often do you eat green salad?
- How many servings of vegetables do you usually eat in a day?

Preventing Chronic Health Problems

There are many different types of chronic health problems like asthma, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, heart disease and epilepsy. Leading a healthy lifestyle can prevent most of these problems.

Healthy Habits that Prevent Chronic Health Problems

- Maintaining a healthy and balanced diet
- Keeping your salt intake low
- Limiting alcohol intake (alcohol should NEVER be consumed if you may be pregnant, are pregnant, or are breast-feeding)
- Not smoking
- Understanding your blood pressure
- Taking medication exactly as directed
- Visiting your medical provider regularly
- Increasing physical activity to 30-minutes a day

- Reducing BMI
- Eating a balanced diet
- Screening and treatment for high blood pressure and cholesterol
- Having consistent health care coverage

Risk Factors

- Tobacco Use– This is the single most preventable cause of death in the U.S.
- Lack of Physical Activity– regular activity reduces risk for all major chronic health problems
- Poor Nutrition– a balanced diet greatly reduces the risk for all major chronic health problems
- Overweight/Obesity– dramatically increases risk for developing chronic health problems
- High Blood Pressure– a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke
- High Blood Cholesterol– one of the major independent risk factors for heart disease and stroke
- Lack of Mammography– Can allow breast cancer to advance to later, more difficult to treat stages.

Asthma

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung condition that is characterized by episodes or attacks of difficult breathing. This is caused by the swelling of airways which makes it hard for air to move in and out. Asthma cannot be cured but it can be controlled. More women than men suffer from asthma.

What are the symptoms of Asthma?

- Wheezing and coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

What triggers Asthma?

- Allergy causing items such as pet dander, dust, pollen and mold
- Irritants in the air such as pollution, smoke, perfume and fumes
- Infections or stress

How is it treated?

- Reduce exposure to the item which is triggering the asthma attacks
- Medications are prescribed which has two forms:
 - Daily to control regular symptoms
 - Rescue medication often referred to as an "inhaler" to use during attack
- Constant monitoring of lung condition and function
- Education of patients and their families
- Regular visits to a doctor

If you have asthma, it is important to get it under control before you get pregnant. When asthma is controlled, women have no more complications during pregnancy and while giving birth than non–asthmatic women.

Uncontrolled Asthma has the following effects on a pregnancy:

- Interferes with oxygen supply to the baby
- Can result in premature birth, low birth weight and blood pressure problems
- Poor breathing patterns which can have a direct effect on the health of mom and baby

Cancer

Cancer is a disease that causes cells to grow unusually. It is the second most common cause of death in the United States. However, there are some ways to prevent cancer.

Controllable Risk Factors:

- Tobacco
- Exposure to sunlight
- Alcohol
- Poor diet, lack of physical activity
- Being overweight

Uncontrollable Risk Factors:

- Growing older
- Family history of cancer
- Exposure to certain chemicals
- Some viruses and germs
- Certain hormones

To help prevent cancer:

- Stay out of the sun from mid-morning until late afternoon
- When you are in the sun, wear long sleeves or sunscreen
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables
- Do not use tobacco products
- Limit alcohol use

There are lots of different warning signs of cancer. Here are some of them:

- A thick lump in the breast or elsewhere
- A sore that does not heal
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits
- Difficulty swallowing
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- A new mole or change in an old mole
- Hoarseness or a cough that won't stop
- Discomfort after eating
- Unexplained weight gain or loss
- Feeling weak or tired

Screening, testing for cancer before experiencing symptoms, is an important step in fighting cancer. Here is some important screening information:

- Lung: There is no screening for lung cancer. However, it is the leading cause of cancer deaths for men and women. Cigarette smoking causes more than 80% of lung cancer cases, and quitting smoking is the best way to reduce risk.
- Colon and Rectum: Screening can reduce the national colorectal cancer death rate by at least 30%, so talk to your doctor about which screenings are best for you.
- Breast: Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among American women. Regular mammograms (picture x-ray of the breast) can catch breast cancer at its most treatable stage and greatly improve chances for survival.
- Cervix: Have a Pap smear (testing of cells from the cervix) every year. This is the single most important tool for preventing this highly curable form of cancer. There is also an HPV vaccine available, which can prevent 3 types of HPV that are known to cause most (not all) cervical cancers.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition in which the body either does not produce insulin or cannot use insulin properly. Insulin is important because it helps move sugar into body cells to make energy. If sugar cannot enter cells, it builds up in the blood. The buildup of sugar in the blood leads to damage of eyes, kidneys, blood vessels and nerves.

Complications from diabetes are among the top 10 causes of death for all women.

Gestational Diabetes is diabetes that is diagnosed during pregnancy. For most women diagnosed with this condition, blood sugar levels return to normal after pregnancy. If gestational diabetes is not well controlled, there is an increased chance for the baby to have high blood sugar and breathing problems at birth.

What are the symptoms of diabetes?

- Frequent urination
- Excessive thirst
- Extreme hunger
- Unusual weight loss
- Increased fatigue
- Irritability
- Blurry vision

If you have one or more of these diabetes symptoms, see your doctor right away.

How can I help myself if I have diabetes?

- Control your blood sugar level
- Eat right, never skipping meals and following suggested guidelines
- Exercise 4 to 6 times per week
- Maintain a healthy weight
- If needed, take insulin
- If you become pregnant, talk with your doctor about potential complications
- Do not smoke

Please see your physician if you are experiencing these symptoms.

Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women. One in three American women dies of heart disease.

How do you know if you have a heart disease?

The symptoms of heart disease can be different for women so symptoms are often overlooked or misdiagnosed. Here are some symptoms that women should look for:

- Pain or discomfort in the center of the chest for more than 20 minutes
- Arm, back, neck, jaw or stomach pain or discomfort lasting more than 20 minutes
- Shortness of breath
- Cold sweat
- Nausea
- Feeling faint
- Unusual tiredness or difficulty sleeping
- Indigestion (upset stomach)
- Anxiety

Risk factors you cannot control:

- Pre-existing coronary heart disease, previous heart problems
- Age: the risk increases after age 55
- Family history: a father or brother diagnosed before age 55, a sister or mother diagnosed before age 65

Risk factors you can control:

- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- High blood cholesterol
- Overweight
- Physical inactivity
- Diabetes

An action plan for heart health should include:

- Stopping smoking
- Eating healthy
- Becoming physically active every day
- Getting tested and managing diabetes
- Managing stress
- Gathering support from family and friends
- Receiving regular cholesterol tests
- Checking blood pressure

Overlooking the risk of heart disease can be fatal!

Even though it's not nearly as talked about, heart disease is more deadly than breast cancer. One in two women dies of heart disease or stroke, compared to one in thirty women who dies of breast cancer.