

# Live Healthy Georgia— Seniors Taking Charge Women's Health

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Ladies, in order to maintain good health, we need to be aware of conditions that can affect our health and how to prevent them. In this newsletter, we will focus on women and ways to decrease disease risk overall.



## Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women and men worldwide. Risk factors include tobacco use; diets high in saturated fats, cholesterol, salt, or sodium; physical inactivity; obesity; excessive alcohol intake (more than one drink a day for women); high LDL cholesterol and triglycerides; high blood pressure; uncontrolled diabetes mellitus; and genetics. By maintaining a healthy diet and regular physical activity, avoiding tobacco use, controlling your chronic conditions, and reducing your stress levels, you can lower your risks of heart disease.

## Cancer

Cancer is a group of diseases in which the body's cells grow out of control and can cause illness and death if not treated. The types of cancer that are of particular concern to women include breast, lung, and colorectal cancers. Your risks for

these cancers increases with age, family history, excessive alcohol consumption, obesity, tobacco use, and a diet low in fruits, vegetables, and fiber and high in fat. With breast cancer, early onset of menstruation or late menopause, never having a child or having one after age 30, history of

diethylstilbestrol use, hormone replacement therapy use, and radiation can increase your risks. As with many diseases, regular screening with your healthcare provider can decrease your risk of cancers.

## Stroke

A stroke happens when a clot blocks blood supply to the brain or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. This can permanently damage parts of your brain and lead to disability and even death. Your risk of stroke increases as you age, and although men are more likely to have strokes, more women die from strokes than men. In addition, Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives have a greater risk of stroke than non-Hispanic whites or Asians do. Other risk factors for stroke include family history, tobacco and alcohol use, physical inactivity, high blood pressure and

cholesterol, heart disease, uncontrolled diabetes, overweight and obesity, a previous stroke, or sickle cell disease.

### **Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases**

These diseases are chronic bronchitis and emphysema (also called chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases) and asthma. With chronic bronchitis and emphysema, breathing progressively gets more difficult, and individuals may cough up large amounts of mucus, wheeze, and have chest tightness and other symptoms. Risk factors for bronchitis and emphysema include tobacco smoking, environmental exposures, and genetics. With asthma, individuals also experience shortness of breath and may wheeze, have chest tightness, and experience frequent coughing. For asthma, genetics strongly contribute to the disease, and individuals with allergies are more likely to have the disease.

### **Alzheimer's Disease**

With this disease, a loss of brain function occurs, called dementia. Individuals' memory, language, thinking, ability to make decisions, and personality are impaired. As you age, your risk increases; also, women are more likely to have Alzheimer's. However, the disease is not a part of normal aging. There is currently no proven way to prevent Alzheimer's, although if you have a known family history of the disease, speak with your healthcare provider about medications that may prevent it. Also, a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, and cold-water fish may be beneficial.

### **Diabetes Mellitus**

Diabetes is when your blood glucose

(sugar) levels are higher than normal.

Older adults are more likely to develop diabetes because the aging body gradually makes less insulin, which is needed to use energy from the food that you eat. Individuals with diabetes may have frequent urination, excessive thirst, hunger, fatigue, or tingling in the hands or feet. In addition to age, obesity, physical inactivity, family history, and race/ethnicity are also risk factors.

### **Take Charge of Your Health**

A good general guideline to reduce your risk of most chronic diseases is to make healthier choices on a daily basis. Aim to eat a healthy diet with vegetables, fruits, whole grains, high-fiber foods, and lean proteins. Also, manage chronic conditions and schedule regular check-ups with your healthcare providers, especially if you have any of the symptoms or risk factors listed above. Be physically active for at least 30 minutes a day, and try to manage your stress. Always remember that your health is a journey, not a destination!

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