

## Women – Take Steps to Better Health

We've turned the corner into May, leaving the last weekend of April with its snow and cold rain behind us (we hope!). Fingers crossed, we'll step into warmer spring weather for good. Soon we will be celebrating Mother's Day and remembering all that moms do for our families.

Moms can act like superheroes, taking care of everything and everybody. But Moms need to take care of themselves, too. If you *are* a mom, "listen up." If you *have* a mom or *are married to* a mom, "pay attention" – we've got some hints below to help you encourage the moms in your family to take steps for better health.

First of all, age is just a number! You're never too young or too old to be your healthiest you. Don't know where to start or need help setting or meeting your health goals? Here are three big steps to better health:

**Step 1:** Schedule your annual well-woman visit with your healthcare provider to get started. Find a doctor or clinic you are comfortable with and establish a relationship through your yearly visits. Having one doctor or clinic means you have a 'medical home'. The good thing about a medical home is that you belong there, your records are there, there is consistency in care, and things don't get overlooked or repeated unnecessarily.

Women who don't see a doctor regularly can miss out on important cancer screenings and tests that detect chronic disease. Unfortunately this lack of care can lead to a shortened life or a future with illness that may decrease quality of life and require costly medication to manage.

You have the power to change this. If you are that woman, or your mom, sister, aunt or friend is that woman, call a doctor today and set up an appointment. Then take the next step and go to the appointment!

Most insurance plans cover a yearly physical and blood work under preventive care. If you do not have insurance and aren't sure what you can do, call us. There are programs that assist people who don't have insurance. You are important and you deserve care. South Heartland District Health Department is committed to helping all persons in our district to access health care.

**Step 2:** Make healthy choices. Heart disease and cancer are the two leading causes of death in women. By taking control of your health and making healthy lifestyle choices, you can reduce your risk for these diseases. For example...

- Stay away from tobacco. If you smoke, take steps to quit.
- Maintain a healthy weight. If you aren't at a healthy weight, set a reasonable goal and get started.
- Get moving. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate physical activity every week.
- Eat healthy with 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one drink a day.
- Get 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night.

- Know your blood pressure and cholesterol numbers and take an active role in managing your medical conditions.
- Know yourself, your family history and your risks.

Step 3: Protect yourself. Review your immunization history and update as your doctor recommends. Get yearly flu shots and get an HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer. Protect your skin and eyes from the sun, avoiding sunburns and checking yourself monthly for skin changes that might lead to skin cancer. Protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases.

Your mental health is as important as your physical health. Maintain healthy relationships. If you are not in a safe relationship, you are not alone - ask for help. Talk to someone you trust or a professional if you are feeling stressed, anxious or depressed. You are important.

Finally, protect yourself by always wearing your seat belt, driving the speed limit and committing to no cell phone use while driving.

Let South Heartland District Health Department be your resource for additional information on these "steps to better health." Call us at 1-877-238-7595, visit our website at [www.southheartlandhealth.org](http://www.southheartlandhealth.org) and us follow us on Facebook. And remember, it's never too early or too late to work on being a healthier you!

Join us in celebrating Women's Health Week, May 14-20, by starting conversations and encouraging the women in your life to practice healthy habits and take steps to better health.

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