

## Women's Health Information/Women's Health Visit

Routine Women's Health Visits are a very important part of your health care. This is an opportunity for you and your clinician to review reproductive health issues and concerns. Your clinician will offer appropriate screening and diagnostic tests to help you maintain optimum health based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Cancer Society, USPTF community and national experts. A routine exam may be every 1-2 years depending on your age and risk factors. Listed are some things that may be included in your visit depending on your personal history.

**Screening for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)** will be done upon your request or your clinician's recommendation. Chlamydia, the most common STI, and gonorrhea may be tested by a Q-tip swab to the cervix, or a urine test. The CDC now recommends routine HIV testing for people between 14 and 64. You may ask your clinician for the confidential test which is done by blood test in the lab. Other tests that may be offered depending on risk include screening for Hepatitis B, syphilis and herpes.

**Breast and Pelvic Exams** include palpation (examination by touch and/or pressure). Abnormal growths, including cancers of the breasts, ovaries and uterus are sometimes found by palpation. Depending on your age and/or symptoms breast and/or pelvic examination may be performed.

**Cancers:** Breast, uterine, ovarian and colon cancers are more common in women over age 50, but can occur in younger women. Cervical cancer is now believed to be caused by the Human Papilloma Virus, an STI, and can occur in young women.

**Pap Smears:** Detect cervical dysplasia (abnormal cervical cells) and cervical cancer. Pap smears provide an opportunity for early detection to prevent cervical cancer. At UHS, we use "liquid based" pap smears which should be routinely performed (as part of a pelvic exam) every 3 years starting at age 21 and every 5 years if age 30 and older. Your clinician will make recommendations based on your age and personal history.

• **Warning signs or indications to seek medical care include:**

- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Abdominal lump, swelling or bloating
- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, spotting or discharge
- Pain with intercourse
- Breast lump, pain or discharge
- Abnormal bleeding, irregular menses or absence of menses
- Possible exposure to a S.T.I.
- Unexplained weight loss
- Persistent digestive problems
- Fever

**Detailed information** on Breast Self Exam, Gyn Cancers, and STIs and other health concerns is available upon request from your provider or on the University Health Service website, [www.uhs.berkeley.edu](http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu). Other useful websites: Gyn Cancer information [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov), online information regarding sexually transmitted infections [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org), online information regarding general health topics [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov).

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### Breast Health

**Breast Self Exam:** Although the risk of having breast cancer in your 20s and 30s is low, it can happen. Your 20s and 30s are a time in which to become familiar with your breasts and be observant for changes. Report any changes or discrete lumps to your health care provider.

**Mammography** is an x-ray of the breast, which is used to help find breast cancer early along with the clinical breast exam. If cancers are found when they are small, there is a higher rate of cure. The American Cancer Society recommends yearly mammograms starting at age 40. CDC recommends mammograms every 2 years from ages 50-74. Based on symptoms or family history your clinician may recommend mammogram or ultrasound imaging at an earlier age.

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### Emergency Contraception

Emergency Contraception, "the morning after pill", or Plan B, is safe, legal and now available without a prescription. "Plan B" is a 1 high dose progesterone-only pill that is usually well tolerated. It should be taken as soon as possible within 5 days after unprotected intercourse. Plan B is not a good routine form of contraception since it is 70-80% effective in preventing pregnancy and causes nausea for some women, but it can be very helpful in an emergency situation. Ella is another type of emergency contraception. It is also 1 pill to take within 5 days. Ella is available by prescription and is free with Berkeley SHIP.

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### Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis, or "thinning of the bones," is a leading cause of disability in older women. Postmenopausal women with osteoporosis are at higher risk of fractures leading to pain and immobility. Prevention begins in childhood and young adulthood by building "peak bone mass." We build bone up until age 30 and then by our mid-30s begin to lose it. To build bone, teenagers require 1200 to 1500 mg and women ages 25 to 50 need 1000 mg of **elemental calcium** a day. One cup of milk (skim or low fat) has about 300 mg of calcium, plain yogurt (1 cup) has about 415 mg, and 1/2 cup of tofu has 130 mg of calcium. Orange juice or soy milk fortified with added calcium is another source. Green vegetables and nuts also contain calcium but absorption is more variable than from dairy sources. Calcium supplements such as Tums, Oscal or Caltrate are alternatives. Vitamin D is essential for calcium absorption. **Weight bearing exercises** (walking, running, dancing) for lower body and spine, and upper body weight lifting are also important to keep your bones strong. Regular exercise is also important for physical and mental health; aim for 30 minutes 3 times per week as a start.

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### Vitamin D

New evidence-based research suggests the importance of Vitamin D in calcium absorption, cancer prevention and overall well-being. Sources of Vitamin D include milk, oily fish like salmon, and sun exposure, but it is unlikely to get adequate Vitamin D from diet or sunlight alone. While the best level of Vitamin D is still being researched, it is recommended to take a Vitamin D supplement of 600-1000 IU daily.

### Folic Acid

Taken at least 30 days before and immediately after becoming pregnant, folic acid reduces neural tube defects, a serious birth defect, by 50 to 70%. Because of the chance of unplanned pregnancy, the Food & Drug Administration recommends that **all women of childbearing age take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid daily**. Folic Acid is found naturally in dark green leafy vegetables, oranges, yeast, liver, and fortified grains. It is difficult, however, to obtain 400 micrograms through diet alone. Most brands of daily multivitamins contain 400 mcg of Folic Acid.

### Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) is the most common sexually transmitted infection. The majority of sexually active individuals have been infected with HPV at some point; most of these people appear healthy and have no visible signs of the infection. In most cases, the body's immune system can clear the infection within 3 years with no treatment required. While HPV most often does not cause problems, it is a known precursor to dysplasia (abnormal cells on the cervix) and cervical cancer. The PAP smear test is an excellent screening test for cervical dysplasia and early changes associated with cervical cancer. When early changes of the cervical cells are detected, treatment can prevent cervical cancer; therefore, a pap smear every 3 years is a very important health practice. Condom use is up to 70% effective in preventing HPV transmission. HPV can also be transmitted by genital skin to skin contact without intercourse and is responsible for external genital warts. An FDA-approved vaccine called GARDASIL is now available for women and men age 9-26. The vaccine provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18 which are present in 70% of all cervical cancers and most vaginal and vulvar cancers, as well as Types 6 and 11 which are associated with 90% of external genital warts. Gardasil is available at the Tang Center's Specialty Clinic by appointment (call 643-7177) and is covered by Berkeley SHIP.

### Viral Hepatitis

**Hepatitis** is an inflammation of the liver that is often caused by a viral infection. It may cause significant illness and could become a chronic health issue. **Hepatitis B** is a sexually transmitted disease. Like HIV, you can get Hepatitis B from any contact with infected blood or body fluids. It can be present with no symptoms, or with jaundice (yellowing of eyes and skin), nausea, and fatigue. In many cases, there is often complete cure without treatment. A minority of cases can lead to chronic liver disease. Some people become silent "carriers" of the virus and can infect others for the rest of their lives; these individuals are also at increased risk of liver cancer. Some people are infected at birth if they were born to infected parents in an endemic area (including Asia, Africa, Alaska, Pacific Islands and the Amazon region). People born in endemic areas should have a blood test to make sure they are not "carriers". There is a safe vaccine series for Hepatitis B that can prevent you from getting this disease. Using condoms and practicing safer sex can also reduce your risk. The Hepatitis B vaccine series is now a routine pediatric vaccination and is available here at UHS.

**Hepatitis A** is often associated with contaminated food or water or may be related to sexual or household contact with an infected person. It usually resolves over time without chronic problems but can be prevented by a safe and effective vaccine.

**Hepatitis C** is found by blood test (of those infected). Most people who get Hepatitis C carry the virus for the rest of their lives. There is no vaccine currently available to prevent Hepatitis C so avoiding risk factors such as IV drugs, sharing needles, and risky sexual behaviors is the only sure prevention.

### HIV

HIV is a viral infection that infects white blood cells that manage the body's immune system. The virus is transmitted through contact with infected semen, blood, vaginal and cervical secretions, and breast milk. HIV is most likely to be transmitted by unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse, sharing needles, and/or blood transfusions. **Using latex condoms properly substantially reduces the risk of HIV transmission.** Many people infected with HIV have no symptoms. HIV testing indicates whether a person has developed antibodies to HIV. The test usually becomes positive three to six months after a person is infected. Early treatment of HIV infection can preserve your health. Women should consider HIV testing before attempting pregnancy. The CDC recommends routine HIV testing for people between 14 and 64. You can ask your clinician to order a confidential HIV blood test.

### Routine Vaccines

If you are considering pregnancy in the near future and are not sure whether you have an immunity to **Rubella**, consider checking it (with a blood test) and getting a Rubella vaccination if you find you are not immune. Rubella infection during a pregnancy can lead to serious birth defects. If you did not have **chicken pox** as a child and have not been vaccinated, a blood test for varicella immunity can

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be done. Vaccination would be advised if you are not immune. **Tetanus booster shots** are recommended every 10 years. Hepatitis B and A vaccines are also recommended as a one time series of shots (see above).

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