

WOMEN'S HEALTH GUIDE

May 2022

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Whatever stage of your life that you are in, it's important to understand and look after your physical and mental health. You may be preparing for pregnancy, going through the menopause or looking for answers to a general health query.



Physical Health

It's important to look after your physical health, this should include exercise, healthy eating and ensuring you get enough sleep.

Exercise helps both your physical and mental health, so it's important to stay active. A few hours of gentle exercise a week will release endorphins that make you feel energised. This could be as simple as a walk, a run, a cycle ride, dancing or even some gardening. In simple terms exercising makes you feel good.

For more details on looking after your physical health read our physical health guide [here](#) and our wellbeing guide [here](#).

For more details on eating well, read our nutrition guide [here](#).



Sleep

You spend about a third of your life asleep. Sleep is essential, it is as important to your body as eating, drinking and breathing, and is vital for maintaining good mental and physical health. Sleeping helps you to recover from mental as well as physical exertion.

For more details, read our sleep guide [here](#).



The main physical health issues that women face are:

Cancer

According to Cancer Research UK breast cancer is the most common cancer in UK females, accounting for almost a third (30%) of all female cases. The next most common cancers in UK females are [lung cancer](#) and [bowel cancer](#). Breast, lung and bowel cancers together account for over half of all new cases in females in the UK.

Breast cancer

Most women diagnosed with [breast cancer](#) are over the age of 50, but younger women can also get breast cancer.

There's a good chance of recovery if it's detected at an early stage.

It's vital that women check their breasts regularly for any changes and always have any changes examined by a GP.

Gynaecological cancers

There are five gynecological cancers – [womb](#), [ovarian](#), [cervical](#), [vulval](#) and [vaginal](#), but awareness levels of these cancers is very low.

The most common of these cancers is womb (also known as endometrial or uterine).



Preventing cancers

Leading a healthy lifestyle can help to prevent cancers. The following measures will help you reduce your risk of cancer:

- Take part in the cervical and breast screening programmes provided by the NHS
- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke
- Maintain a healthy body weight



Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a health condition that weakens bones, making them fragile and more likely to break. It develops slowly over several years and is often only diagnosed when a fall or sudden impact causes a fracture.

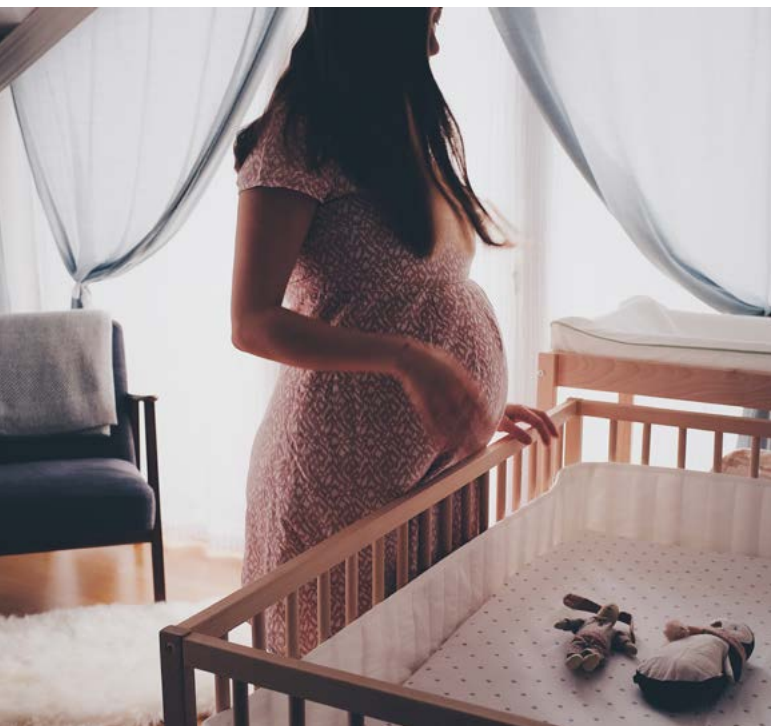
Women are more at risk of osteoporosis than men, particularly if the menopause begins early (before the age of 45) or they've had their ovaries removed. Women will lose bone rapidly in the first few years after the menopause.

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb starts to grow in other places, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes.

Endometriosis can affect women of any age.

It's a long-term condition that can have a significant impact on your life, but there are treatments that can help.



Fertility & Pregnancy

If you are pregnant or thinking about trying for a baby, then it's important to think about your health. If you smoke or drink alcohol, now is a good time to stop. Ensure you are eating a balanced diet and taking a folic acid supplement. If you have a long term medical condition or take regular medication it's important to talk to your GP before trying to conceive.

For everything you need to know about trying for a baby, pregnancy and birth read the NHS guide [here](#).

Some people get pregnant quickly, but for others it can take longer. According to the NHS 1 in 7 couples may have difficulty conceiving.

It's a good idea to see a GP if you have not conceived after a year of trying.

Women aged 36 and over, and anyone who's already aware they may have **fertility problems**, should see their GP sooner.

The GP can then check for common causes of fertility problems and suggest treatments that could help.

For more details on infertility click [here](#).



Menopause

The menopause is a natural stage of life that millions of women experience. It is marked by changes in hormones and the ending of menstruation. It can also bring many other physical and emotional changes. Millions of women go through the menopause and there is great support available.

In the UK, the average age for a woman to reach the menopause is 51, but the menopause commonly happens any time between the ages of 42 and 56 as a woman's estrogen levels decline. But around 1 in 100 women experience the menopause before 40 years of age. This is known as **premature menopause** and may be caused by hormonal imbalances, chemotherapy, radiation or a hysterectomy.

Menopausal symptoms can begin months or even years before your periods stop and last around 4 years after your last period, although some women experience them for much longer.

It's worth talking to a GP if you have menopausal symptoms that are troubling you or if you're experiencing symptoms of the menopause before 45 years of age.

The menopause is a natural turning point in a woman's life that marks the end of the menstrual cycle and childbearing years. For more information on the menopause read our guide by clicking [here](#).

Mental Health

According to Mental Health Foundation, in England, around one in five women has a common mental health problem such as anxiety, depression or self-harm.

Women generally find it easier to talk about their feelings and have stronger social networks than men, both of which can help protect their mental health.

It's as important to look after your mental health as it is your physical health. For more details, read our mental health guide [here](#).

Depression

One in four women experience depression compared to one in 10 men. This may be due to factors such as poverty, isolation and hormonal changes. Around 10-20% of women experience depression while they're pregnant or after giving birth.

Women have a longer life expectancy than men, meaning they're more likely to experience the mental health difficulties that can come with older age. Losses such as bereavement or loss of independence can lead to depression.

Most people go through periods of feeling down, but when you're depressed you feel persistently sad for weeks or months, rather than just a few days. Symptoms of depression can range from mild to severe and may include suicidal feelings. For more details of depression click [here](#).

If you are feeling depressed, then it's important to talk to your GP and get help.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of stress, panic, worry or fear, which can be mild or severe.

Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. For example, you may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam, or having a medical test or job interview. During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal.

Some people find it hard to control their worries. Their feelings of anxiety are more constant and can often affect their daily lives. If your feelings of anxiety are affecting your daily life, then it's important to talk to your GP and get help.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders are not about food or weight but are attempts to deal with emotional and stress-related issues.

Unhealthy eating behaviours may include eating too much or too little or worrying about your weight or body shape.

Anyone can get an eating disorder, but teenagers between 13 and 17 are mostly affected.

If you or a loved one are experiencing the symptoms of an eating disorder, early intervention is vital. So it's important to contact your GP as soon as possible.



Stress Awareness - it's important to put measures in place to reduce any stress you are feeling and to take a moment to think about your own wellbeing and find out more on how to manage stress. For more details, read our stress awareness guide [here](#).

Police Mutual Services

We've teamed up with **PayPlan***, one of the UK's leading free debt advice providers, who offer free and confidential advice to anyone in serious financial difficulties.

They're able to advise you on a range of debt solutions suited to your individual circumstances, helping to protect you and your family with a sustainable way to manage your debt.

Get free and confidential help to combat your debt, call **PayPlan*** on **0800 197 8433**.

Three smartphones are shown side-by-side, displaying the Health Assured app interface. The first phone shows a 'Change your preferences' screen with icons for Work Life, Sleep, Quit Smoking, Mental Health, Finance, and Stress. The second phone shows a 'Good morning, Harry' screen with a 'Mood Tracker' and 'Your Personalised Daily Feed' section. The third phone shows a 'Health Hub' screen with a 'Mood Tracker' and 'Recommended for you' section. Below the phones is the 'health assured' logo and the text 'Download the Health Assured App and register today - your code is MHA107477'. There are also 'Download on the App Store' and 'GET IT ON Google Play' buttons.

Our **Care Line** Service provided by Health Assured can offer advice and information, helping with a range of concerns including emotional support. Take a look at the e-portal or download the APP.

Health & Wellbeing e-portal:
<https://healthassuredeap.co.uk>
Username: policemutual
Password: careline

To read more of our wellbeing guides take a look at our **Wellbeing Hub** [here](#).

Call us 01543 441630
Visit policemutual.co.uk

We're open from
9am - 5pm Mon - Fri

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