

Women's Health



Important Role of Friendships

Women's friendships are a remarkable tapestry woven with threads of trust, support, empathy and shared experiences.

These connections play a profound role in shaping women's lives, offering a sanctuary of understanding, laughter and solace amidst life's joys and challenges. Here's a glimpse into the power and beauty of women's friendships.

One of the most striking aspects of women's friendships is their depth and emotional resonance. Female friendships often provide a safe space for vulnerability, where women can express their fears, dreams and insecurities without fear of judgment. The ability to share both joys and sorrows with trusted friends fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens emotional resilience.

Moreover, women's friendships are characterized by empathy and active listening. Friends offer a shoulder to lean on during difficult times, offering compassionate support and validation. Whether navigating heartbreak, career setbacks or personal struggles, women draw strength from the empathy and understanding of their friends, knowing they are not alone in their experiences.

TheWell.com reports: "Research from UCLA suggests that women who have support



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from female friends during stressful times may live longer than those who don't. One study of women diagnosed with breast cancer even found that participants with 10 or more friends had a higher survival rate than those without close friendships."

Shared experiences and memories form the fabric of women's friendships, creating bonds that withstand the test

of time. From late-night heart-to-heart conversations to spontaneous adventures and celebrations, these shared moments create a rich tapestry of friendship that enriches and enlivens life.

Women's friendships also serve as a source of empowerment and inspiration. Friends cheer each other on in their achievements, celebrating milestones and victories, both

big and small. They serve as sounding boards for ideas and aspirations, offering encouragement and support as women pursue their goals and dreams.

Women's friendships also foster personal growth and self-discovery. Friends challenge each other to step outside their comfort zones, embrace new opportunities and embrace their authentic

selves. Through honest feedback and encouragement, women empower each other to reach their full potential and live life to the fullest.

In essence, friendships enrich women's lives in countless ways, offering unwavering support, understanding and companionship through life's ups and downs. Making time for friendships can improve our lives in myriad ways.

Starting Group Exercise Classes

Group exercise classes offer a dynamic and motivating way to achieve fitness goals while enjoying the camaraderie of a supportive community.

Whether you're new to fitness or looking to switch up your routine, joining a group class can be an excellent way to stay motivated, accountable and engaged. Here's a beginner's guide to navigating the world of group exercise classes.

A 2017 study in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* found that group exercise improves mental, physical and emotional quality of life and reduces stress far more than individual exercise.

GETTING STARTED

First, explore your options. Group exercise classes come in a wide variety of formats, from high-energy cardio workouts like spinning and dance-based classes to strength training sessions, yoga and Pilates. Research different classes offered at local gyms, community centers or fitness studios to find one that aligns with your interests, fitness level and goals.

Once you've chosen a class, don't be afraid to introduce yourself to the instructor and let them know you're new. They can offer guidance on proper form, modifications for begin-



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ners and answer any questions you may have. Arrive a few minutes early to get set up and familiarize yourself with the equipment and layout of the class.

MAKE THE MOST OF CLASS

Listen to your body and go at your own pace. It's okay to take breaks, modify exercises or reduce intensity if you need

to. Remember that everyone starts somewhere and progress takes time. Focus on your own journey rather than comparing yourself to others in the class.

Engage with the group and soak up the energy of the class. Group exercise classes are as much about the sense of community and support as they are about fitness. Encourage your classmates, celebrate milestones together

and feed off the collective motivation to push yourself further than you might on your own.

Lastly, have fun and be open to trying new things. Group exercise classes are a fantastic opportunity to discover new workouts, challenge yourself and find enjoyment in physical activity. Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone and embrace the experience

with an open mind.

Group exercise classes offer a fun, effective and social way to pursue fitness goals and improve overall health. By exploring different class formats, listening to your body, engaging with the group and maintaining a positive attitude, you can make the most of your group exercise experience and embark on a rewarding fitness journey.

Reproductive Health Choices

There are a diverse range of reproductive health choices available to women.

Access to comprehensive information and health care services is critical in ensuring women can make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

CONTRACEPTION OPTIONS

Contraception methods that are typically widely available include hormonal methods, such as birth control pills, patches and injections; non-hormonal methods, such as condoms, diaphragms and cervical caps; long-acting reversible contraceptives such as intrauterine devices and implants, and natural family planning methods.

Implants and IUDs are most effective at preventing pregnancy, are the most convenient to use, and the most foolproof, according to Planned Parenthood. Other birth control methods, such as the pill, ring, patch and shot, work well when used perfectly, but getting it right every time can be a challenge.

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

Emergency contraception can help keep you from getting pregnant if you had sex without using birth control or if your birth control method did not work, according to the Office on Women's Health. Some ECPs



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can work when taken within five days of unprotected sex or when your birth control does not work correctly. Some are available without a prescription. In January 2022, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration allowed retail pharmacies to begin offering abortion pills for the first time.

FAMILY PLANNING AND FERTILITY AWARENESS

Family planning and fertility awareness methods, such as tracking menstrual cycles, basal body temperature and cervical mucus changes to identify fertile days, can be used for both contraception and achieving pregnancy,

empowering women to take control of their reproductive health and fertility goals. Check with your health care provider about how to use these methods effectively.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

We've come a long way from the introduction of the

very first hormonal contraceptive in the U.S. in 1960. Given the many options available today, and the challenges of navigating local laws and regulations, talking to your doctor is the best way to determine which method of contraception is best for you and your situation.

Menstrual Health, Period Equity

Menstrual health and period equity have garnered increasing attention globally in recent years.

Beyond being a biological process, menstruation carries social, economic and cultural implications that affect individuals worldwide.

Despite progress in addressing these issues, however, significant disparities persist, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive action and advocacy.

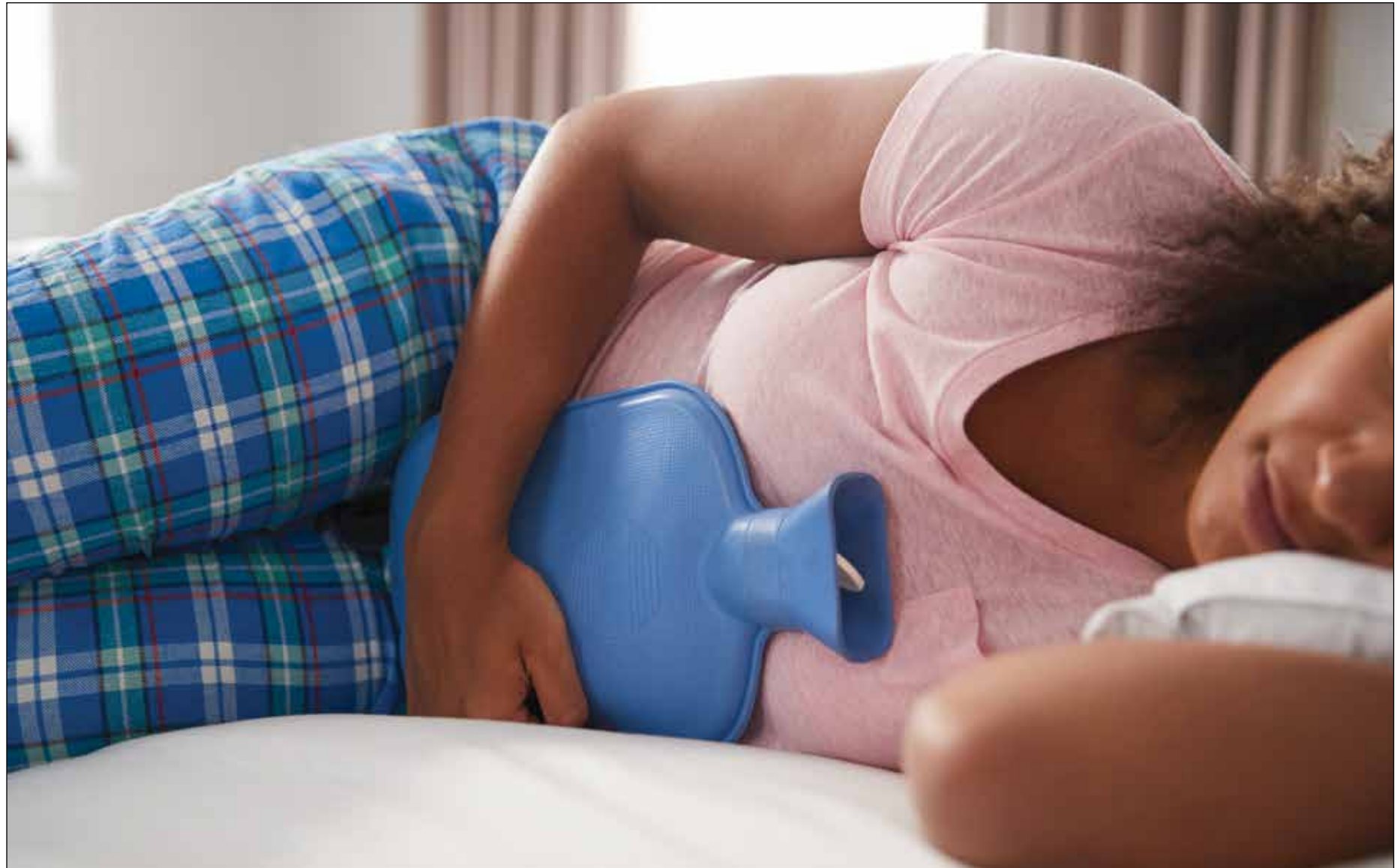
WHAT IS IT?

At its core, menstrual health encompasses the physical, emotional and social well-being of individuals throughout their menstrual cycles. Access to menstrual hygiene products, education about menstruation and adequate health care are fundamental aspects of menstrual health.

Unfortunately, many individuals, particularly those in marginalized communities, face barriers to these essentials.

Period equity, on the other hand, focuses on ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to menstrual products, education and support, regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender identity, or geographical location.

Achieving period equity requires addressing the financial burden of menstrual products and dismantling the stigma and taboos surround-



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ing menstruation.

The issue is so pressing that the World Health Organization in 2023 said that schools ensuring education on menstrual health, along with adequate hygiene facilities in the developing world, is key for health and equal learning opportunities.

One of the most pressing challenges in the fight for menstrual health and period equity is the widespread lack of access to affordable menstrual products. For many individuals, especially in

low-income countries, these products are prohibitively expensive or simply unavailable. This lack of access not only affects individuals' physical health but also their ability to participate fully in school, work and community life.

SOLUTIONS

Education plays a crucial role in promoting menstrual health and period equity. Comprehensive menstrual education helps dispel myths, reduce stigma and empower

people to make informed choices about their bodies. Moreover, education can foster empathy and understanding, creating more supportive environments for those who menstruate.

Addressing menstrual health and period equity requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy-makers, health care providers, educators and community leaders. Governments must prioritize menstrual health in their public health agendas, ensuring that menstrual prod-

ucts are affordable and accessible to all. Health care providers should offer inclusive and non-judgmental care, while educators must integrate accurate and inclusive menstrual education into school curricula.

Destigmatizing menstruation is essential for achieving true period equity. Open discussions, media representation and community initiatives can all contribute to normalizing menstruation and challenging harmful stereotypes.

Navigating Menopause

Menopause marks a significant milestone in a woman's life.

Typically occurring in her late 40s to early 50s, this natural biological process brings about a cessation of menstruation and signifies the end of reproductive years.

Beyond the physical changes, menopause encompasses a spectrum of experiences that vary from woman to woman.

THE SCIENCE

Understanding the biological mechanisms behind menopause is crucial. It is primarily driven by hormonal shifts, specifically a decline in estrogen and progesterone production by the ovaries. As these hormone levels fluctuate and eventually decline, women may experience a range of symptoms, including hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, vaginal dryness, and changes in libido.

However, it's essential to recognize that the menopause transition is not solely about these physical symptoms. It's a multifaceted journey that can impact a woman's emotional well-being, relationships and overall quality of life. Many women may find themselves grappling with feelings of loss or sadness as they confront the end of their fertility and the onset of a new phase of life.

COPING WITH THE CHANGE

Navigating the menopause



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transition requires a holistic approach that addresses both the physical and emotional aspects of this journey. Education and awareness play a crucial role, empowering women to understand the changes happening in their bodies and seek appropriate support and resources.

Social support is invaluable during this time. Friends, family members and health care

providers can offer understanding, validation and practical advice. Creating a supportive network where women can share their experiences and learn from one another can significantly ease the challenges of the menopause transition.

Additionally, lifestyle modifications can help alleviate some of the symptoms associated with menopause. Regular

exercise, a balanced diet, stress management techniques and adequate sleep can all contribute to improved physical and emotional well-being during this transition.

For women experiencing severe symptoms that significantly impact their quality of life, medical interventions such as hormone replacement therapy or other medications

may be considered. However, it's essential to weigh the potential risks and benefits of these treatments in consultation with a doctor.

Menopause is a natural and inevitable phase of a woman's life. By fostering understanding, providing support and embracing holistic approaches to well-being, women can emerge stronger and more empowered on the other side.

A Guide to Breast Health

Breast health is a crucial aspect of overall well-being for women of all ages.

Understanding how to prevent disease, recognize potential signs of concern and access appropriate care is essential for early detection and prevention of breast-related issues.

PREVENTION

Regular self-examinations are an integral part of breast health. Women should perform breast self-exams monthly to become familiar with the normal look and feel of their breasts. Women need to promptly report any changes such as lumps, swelling, dimpling or nipple discharge to a healthcare provider who can evaluate further.

Experts recommend scheduling clinical breast examinations with a healthcare provider at least every three years for women in their 20s and 30s and annually for women age 40 and older. These examinations can help detect any abnormalities that may not be noticeable during self-exams.

Mammograms are another essential tool in breast health maintenance, particularly for women over the age of 40. These screening tests use low-dose X-rays to detect early signs of breast cancer before symptoms develop. Women should discuss with their health care provider the appropriate timing and frequency of mammograms based on their



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individual risk factors and medical history.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can contribute to breast health. Regular exercise, a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables, limited alcohol consumption, and avoidance of smoking can help reduce the risk of breast cancer and other breast-related issues.

KNOW THE RISKS

Staying informed about breast health and breast cancer risk factors is key. Factors such as age, family history, genetics, hormonal factors and lifestyle choices can influence a woman's risk of developing breast cancer. By understanding these risk factors, women can make informed decisions

about their health and take proactive steps to reduce their risk.

GET CARE

Access to quality health care is vital for maintaining breast health. Women should have regular check-ups with a healthcare provider and be proactive in seeking medical

attention if they notice any changes or concerns regarding their breasts.

By arming themselves with knowledge and resources, women can promote early detection, prevention and optimal management of breast-related issues, ultimately leading to better health outcomes and improved quality of life.

Healthy Foods for Every Life Stage

Proper nutrition is essential for women's health at every stage of life.

From adolescence to menopause and beyond, dietary choices play a crucial role in supporting overall well-being, hormonal balance and disease prevention.

Here's a guide to healthy foods tailored to meet the nutritional needs of women at different life stages.

ADOLESCENCE

During adolescence, when growth and development are at their peak, young women require a nutrient-rich diet to support bone health, hormonal balance, and overall growth. Calcium-rich foods like dairy products, leafy greens and fortified foods are essential for building strong bones and preventing osteoporosis later in life. Iron-rich foods such as lean meats, beans and fortified cereals are also important to prevent iron deficiency anemia, especially during menstruation.

THE REPRODUCTIVE YEARS

In the reproductive years, women's nutritional needs may vary depending on factors like pregnancy, breastfeeding and menstrual cycles. Folic acid-rich foods like leafy greens, citrus fruits and fortified grains are crucial for preventing neural tube defects during pregnancy. Omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish, flaxseed and



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walnuts support fetal brain development and may help alleviate symptoms of postpartum depression.

MIDDLE AGE

As women approach perimenopause and menopause, hormonal changes can affect metabolism, bone density and heart health. Foods rich in phytoestrogens, such as soy products, flaxseed and legumes,

may help alleviate menopausal symptoms and support hormonal balance. Calcium and vitamin D-rich foods continue to be important for maintaining bone health and preventing osteoporosis.

SENIORS

In later life stages, focusing on nutrient-dense foods becomes even more critical for supporting healthy aging and

preventing chronic diseases. Colorful fruits and vegetables provide essential vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that help protect against age-related decline and support immune function. Lean proteins like poultry, fish, tofu and legumes support muscle mass and strength, which can decline with age.

Overall, a balanced diet that includes a variety of nutri-

ent-rich foods is key to supporting women's health at every life stage. By prioritizing whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats, women can nourish their bodies, optimize their health and thrive at every age. Staying hydrated, staying active and practicing mindful eating habits can further enhance overall well-being and vitality throughout life.