

## Staying healthy in your 30s

BY LISA YOUNG STIERS

*Alpha Chi Omega*

Fortunately, for most women in their 30s, health is something you take for granted. You may be busy with jobs, children, volunteer work—or keeping in touch with Alpha Sigma Alpha members—but what you may not be thinking about is preventing and detecting life-threatening diseases such as cancer, heart disease and stroke.

What you do every day, in between conference calls and cleaning the dishes, can make a difference in your overall health. Don't take your health for granted. Do what you can to develop a proactive partnership with your doctor and maintain your health.

"It's like in life, merely taking your car to the mechanic once a year won't keep it running perfectly," says

Dr. Peter Marcus, an OB/GYN and associate professor at Indiana University School of Medicine. "If you constantly run in the red line or take it off-road, taking it to a mechanic won't help it run perfectly."

"That's just like going to the doctor once a year won't keep you perfectly healthy," he continues. "It's the day-to-day things that are required for healthy living. It has to be a cooperative relationship between patient and doctor."

Below are tips gleaned from health professionals and research to help women in their 30s take control of their health.

### Get a baseline mammogram

"Sometime between the ages of 35 and 40, women should have a baseline mammogram," Dr. Marcus says. If there is a family history of breast cancer, your

doctor might recommend creating the baseline at an earlier age.

For most women, it is recommended that you have regular mammograms every one to two years starting at age 40. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms are the best method to detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms.

### Know your numbers

Screening tests can find problems at an early stage, when they can be treated most easily, most effectively and with the fewest side effects. Be sure to ask your doctor about screening tests recommended by the American Cancer Society, American Diabetes Association and American Heart Association. The following list from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) names the tests recommended for people at average risk.

- **Blood pressure**—Check at each regular health care visit. High blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke, both leading causes of death in the United States. About one in three American adults have high blood pressure. Blood pressure is often written as two numbers. The top (systolic) number represents the pressure while the heart is beating. The bottom (diastolic) number represents the pressure when the heart is resting between beats. High blood pressure for adults is defined as a systolic pressure of 140 or higher, or a diastolic pressure of 90 or higher. Normal blood pressure is a systolic blood pressure less than 120 and a diastolic blood pressure less than 80.

- **Body Mass Index (BMI)**—Check at each regular health care visit. You can also check your BMI online at [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm).

- **Clinical breast exam (CBE)**—Get a CBE every



three years until age 40, then yearly with your mammogram.

- **Pap test**—Get one every year from age 20 to 30; at age 30 and beyond, get screened every one to three years depending on the type of test and past results. Talk to your doctor for your personal schedule.
- **Cholesterol check**—Starting at age 20, get tested every five years. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance found in your body and is needed for the body to function normally. Your body makes enough cholesterol for its needs. When there is too much cholesterol in your body—because of diet and the rate at which the cholesterol is processed—it is deposited in arteries, including those of the heart, which can lead to narrowing of the arteries and heart disease. A lipoprotein profile can be done to measure several different kinds of cholesterol as well as triglycerides (another kind of fat found in the blood). Desirable or optimal levels are: total cholesterol, less than 200; Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol (“bad” cholesterol), less than 100; High Density Lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol (“good” cholesterol), 40 or higher; Triglycerides: Less than 150. Depending on your family history and personal medical history, other tests may be needed, or you may need to start screening at a younger age. Talk to your doctor to find out which screening tests are right for you.

### Update your immunizations

Theresa Keck Turski, MPH, BΘ, spends her time urging women to be vaccinated. She is a health specialist in the Influenza Division at the CDC and has worked in the immunization area as well. Many women believe that once they finish their childhood immunization schedule that they are set for life. Not true, Turski says.

“There’s a big scope of vaccinations out there for adults,” she explains. “Talk to your doctor.”

Vaccine recommendations for adults are based on a variety of factors including age, overall health status and medical history. To help you understand what vac-

### On the web

To learn more, visit these web sites:

**American Cancer Society:** [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**American Heart Association:** [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

**Body Mass Index:** <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

**Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005:** [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/)

**National Institutes of Health:** [www.health.nih.gov](http://www.health.nih.gov)

cines you might need, you can complete the Adolescent and Adult Vaccine Quiz online at the web site for the CDC’s National Immunization Program ([www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultImmSched](http://www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultImmSched)). Print your results and discuss them with your doctor or healthcare professional at your next visit.

Immunizations which might be needed by adult women include: Human papillomavirus (HPV); measles-mumps-rubella (MMR); and chickenpox (varicella) vaccine. Also, adults should receive the tetanus booster every 10 years. Turski recommends women consider the influenza vaccination each fall, especially if they are around children.

“That’s a big one,” she says. “Little kids are the reservoir for influenza.”

### Maintain oral health

Regular visits to the dentist can have larger benefits than just shiny, white teeth. Taking care of your teeth can give a significant boost to your overall health, yet only 70 percent of adults report visiting the dentist in the past year. Check-ups can detect early signs of oral health problems and can lead to treatments that will prevent further damage and, in some cases, reverse the problem.

In between visits, there is much you can do to protect the health of your teeth:

- Drink fluoridated water and use a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride’s protection against tooth decay works at all ages.
- Take care of your teeth and gums. Thorough tooth brushing and flossing to reduce dental plaque can prevent gingivitis—the mildest form of gum disease.

- Avoid tobacco. In addition to the general health risks posed by tobacco, smokers have four times the risk of developing gum disease compared to non-smokers. Tobacco use in any form—cigarette, pipes and smokeless tobacco—increases the risk for gum disease, oral and throat cancers and oral fungal infection.
- Limit alcohol. Heavy use of alcohol is also a risk factor for oral and throat cancers. When used alone, alcohol and tobacco are risk factors for oral cancers, but when used in combination the effects of alcohol and tobacco are even greater.
- Eat wisely. Adults should avoid snacks full of sugars and starches. Limit the number of snacks eaten throughout the day. The recommended five-a-day helping of fiber-rich fruits and vegetables stimulates salivary flow to aid remineralization of tooth surfaces with early stages of tooth decay.

### Continue good habits

A number of topics highlighted in the first part of this women’s health series—spotlighting healthy habits for women in their 20s—should continue as women age. Don’t forget to:

- Conduct monthly breast self exams.
- Take a multi-vitamin.
- Wear sunscreen with an SPF factor of at least 15. An SPF of 30 to 45 is even better.
- Don’t smoke.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Get regular exercise.

*For more information on these topics, see the Winter 2007 issue of the Phoenix.*