

FACT SHEET

What women in their 30s and 40s need to know

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the U.S. 4,000 babies a year are born with spinal and other defects because of a **lack of folic acid**, or vitamin B₁₂, in the mother's diet. If a woman doesn't take in enough folic acid during pregnancy, birth defects can occur during the first few weeks of fetal development—often before the woman realizes she's pregnant. The U.S. Public Health Service recommends that women get 400 micrograms of folic acid in their diet or vitamin supplement each day regardless of whether they are trying to conceive. Most women between 19 and 34 get only 200 micrograms a day. **Breakfast cereals, beans and leafy green vegetables** are good food sources of folic acid.



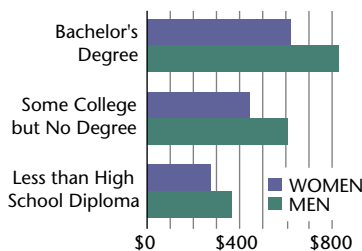
GREGG HADEL, Tony Stone Images

In 55% of U.S. households, women contribute at least half the family income.

GEORGE CHAN, Tony Stone Images

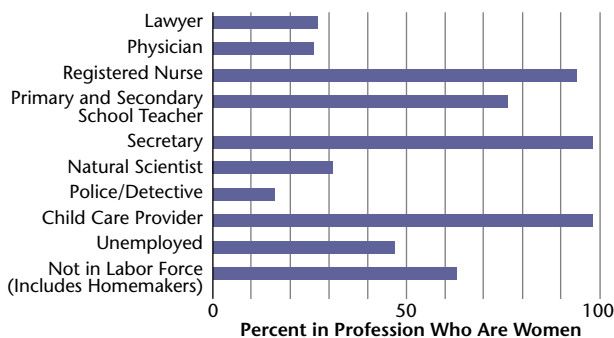
Do you experience an unpleasant burning sensation during urination? You could have a **urinary tract infection (UTI)**, which is treatable with antibiotics from your doctor. UTIs result when bacteria from the vulva enter the urethra and travel upward to the usually sterile bladder or kidneys. One of the best ways to avoid a UTI is to urinate as soon as possible after intercourse to keep bacteria flushed out.

MEDIAN WEEKLY EARNINGS OF FULL-TIME WORKERS 25 YEARS AND OLDER



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997

WOMEN AT WORK



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1997

Although the average age of **menopause** in the U.S. is 51, some women begin experiencing symptoms around age 40. If your monthly cycle extends to 45 days—or you experience hot flashes, night sweats and vaginal dryness—start keeping a calendar of your moods and symptoms. If they continue for three months, make a doctor's appointment and take your calendar. And find out when your mother went through menopause—chances are you'll be about the same age.

As your body ages, it becomes less efficient at absorbing the calcium you need for **STRONG BONES**. The National Institutes of Health recommends a daily dose of 1,000 milligrams of calcium for premenopausal women and 1,400 milligrams a day for pregnant women.

CHECKUP

Essential medical exams for women in their 30s and 40s

MAMMOGRAM

Although experts disagree on how often women should have mammograms, they do agree that surviving breast cancer depends on catching the disease in its infancy. Mammograms are x-rays of your breasts that can reveal cancerous growths or other abnormalities in breast tissue. The test is not perfect, however: mammograms sometimes yield false positives—indicating a malignancy where there really isn't one. An incorrect diagnosis of cancer can lead to tremendous stress and even unnecessary surgery.

The National Cancer Institute prescribes a mammogram once every one to two years for women over 40; the American Cancer Society (ACS) advocates an annual mammogram after 40. The American Medical Association (AMA) doesn't make a recommendation for women between 40 and 50 but suggests they consult their doctors (the AMA does endorse annual mammograms for women older than 50).

If you don't have health insurance to cover this test, call the ACS at 800-ACS-2345 to find the locations of low-cost mammogram clinics in your area.

COST: \$50–\$150

DIABETES TEST

If you are over age 40 and overweight or have a family history of diabetes, you should be screened for diabetes once every three years. Doctors diagnose diabetes by examining levels of glucose in your blood, which will be high if you are diabetic. Your doctor may also request a urine sample to check for the presence of ketones, chemicals that build up in the body if you're diabetic.

For more information, call the American Diabetes Association (ADA) at 800-342-2383 or visit the ADA at <http://www.diabetes.org> on the World Wide Web.

COST: Blood test \$30–\$50

54%

of women older than 18 are married and live with their spouse. (U.S. Census Bureau)



TONY CORDOZA, Liaison International

According to a United Nations survey of 152 countries, the U.S. is one of only six that does not have a national policy mandating paid maternity leave.

72%

of women between the ages of 30 and 45 use some form of birth control. (National Center for Health Statistics)



BETH PHILLIPS

Staying healthy during pregnancy is very important—for both you and your baby. Consult your physician to develop a safe and effective exercise program. Aerobic exercise and moderate weight training are safe for most women, although you should be careful not to overexert yourself or overheat (your body temperature should not exceed 101 degrees Fahrenheit, or—easier to monitor at the gym—your pulse should not rise above 140 beats per minute). After your third month, stay away from exercises that require you to lie on your back—this position is dangerous because it can lower your heart rate and blood pressure as well as reduce blood flow to the baby.

KEITH KENT SP/Photo Researchers, Inc.



✓ **PRENATAL TESTS**

If you are pregnant, make a doctor's appointment as soon as possible to begin prenatal care for you and your baby. Your first visit will be a long one: you'll be asked for a detailed medical history, and your obstetrician will also perform a complete physical exam, including a pelvic exam and Pap test, and will check your blood pressure. He or she will take a sample of blood to determine your blood type and to test for conditions such as anemia, rubella and hepatitis B. Early in the pregnancy, you should be screened for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.

After the initial trip to the doctor, your visits will be shorter. During the first six months of your pregnancy, you'll need to see your obstetrician about once a month; during months seven and eight, you should go in about once every two weeks. During the last month, you should see your doctor once a week until delivery.

Depending on your age and overall health, different tests may be necessary throughout your pregnancy. Mothers with a history of pregnancy problems, high blood pressure or diabetes may need multiple ultrasounds (in which the doctor looks at the baby in the womb using sound imaging) to monitor the fetus's growth and position and to check for physical abnormalities.

Mothers over age 35 often have an amniocentesis test, which involves extracting and examining a sample of the fluid that surrounds the fetus; the test can provide early indications of abnormal development. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists suggests asking your doctor if the test is necessary for you.

Discuss with your obstetrician all the tests that are going to be performed. Be sure you understand why you're having the tests and what the risks are to you and your baby.

COST: Variable but usually covered by insurance.

✓ **SKIN EXAM**

The American Cancer Society recommends that women older than 40 have a doctor examine their skin once a year for melanomas and fast-growing moles that could be signs of skin cancer.

COST: Included in a routine visit to the doctor.

✓ **PELVIC EXAM AND PAP TEST**

The American Cancer Society suggests you schedule a pelvic exam once a year and a Pap test at least once every three years. Your gynecologist may recommend that you have a Pap test more frequently.

COST: Pelvic exam \$40–\$100; Pap test \$20–\$60. Usually covered by insurance.

✓ **UTERINE FIBROIDS EXAM**

Prolonged menstrual periods, pelvic pain and frequent urination could be signs of uterine fibroids. Your doctor can check for these noncancerous growths during a pelvic exam.

COST: Included in a pelvic exam.

✓ **RECTAL EXAM**

After age 40 a rectal exam should be performed with your yearly pelvic exam. Your doctor will inspect the wall between your rectum and vagina for abnormal growths and will check for polyps, hemorrhoids or blood in the rectum itself. Women who have a family history of colorectal cancer should talk to their doctors about any additional tests they should have.

COST: Included in a pelvic exam.

✓ **CHOLESTEROL TEST**

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) reports that a woman's cholesterol level often increases sharply between ages 40 and 60. Don't trust "finger-stick" cholesterol tests offered at work or the shopping mall—they are often inaccurate. To learn more about cholesterol and heart disease, visit <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/nhlbi/nhlbi.htm> on the World Wide Web.

COST: \$20–\$35

✓ **DENTAL EXAM**

Three out of four people older than 35 have some kind of gum disease. Visit the dentist regularly to have your teeth cleaned and examined for cavities.

COST: \$60–\$200

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