

# FACT SHEET

*What women in their 50s and 60s need to know*



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**A**fter menopause, a woman's risk of having a heart attack begins to rise; her risk peaks during her late 60s or 70s, when estrogen levels have been declining for over a decade. One in five women over age 65 develop some form of **heart disease**. The American Heart Association (AHA) reports that 44 percent of women who have a heart attack die within a year, compared with only 27 percent of men. Watch your blood pressure and cholesterol level, exercise regularly and monitor your intake of fat—the AHA recommends a diet that derives no more than 30 percent of its calories from fat.

**I**f you're thinking about having a facelift to get rid of those encroaching **wrinkles**, be prepared to spend close to \$5,000 and several weeks recovering. For more information, visit the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons at <http://www.plasticsurgery.org> on the World Wide Web.

**Cancer of the endometrium**, the lining of the uterus, is the most common cancer of the female reproductive system in the U.S. The average age at diagnosis is 60. It is sometimes detected by a Pap smear, but there is no specific screening test that can catch it early. If you didn't begin menopause until after age 52, are overweight or have never been pregnant, you have a higher risk of developing endometrial cancer. Ask your doctor what symptoms to watch for.

**Too tired?** According to the National Sleep Foundation, Americans sleep, on average, 20 percent less than they did a century ago. **Lack of sleep** accumulates, resulting in depression, low energy and eroded health.

**A NEW TEST FOR OSTEOPOROSIS** was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in March. The test uses ultrasound to detect the loss of bone density characteristic of osteoporosis. The new devices are expected to be smaller and cheaper than current technology, which relies on x-rays of the hips, spine or wrist.

*Some 8.1 million women in the U.S. are diabetic (that's just over 8 percent of all women); most of these women are older than 45. **Diabetes** is one of the top 10 causes of death in the U.S. Diabetic women of any age have more than twice the risk of heart attack than nondiabetic women.*

There were  
**20 million**  
women aged 65  
and older in the  
U.S. in 1996.

(Bureau of the Census)

The average age of menopause in America is 51. You can still become pregnant during **menopause**. Only after you've gone through a full year without a menstrual cycle can you be certain you are no longer fertile.

## CHECKUP

*Essential medical exams for women in their 50s and 60s*



### HEART DISEASE SCREENING

Heart disease is the number-one killer of women in America. Make sure you have your blood pressure and cholesterol checked during regular checkup visits. If further screening is necessary, your doctor may recommend other tests, such as an electrocardiogram, which evaluates the activity of the heart muscle.

**COST:** Blood pressure test included in a routine visit to the doctor; cholesterol test \$20–\$35; electrocardiogram \$40–\$90



### COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING

When women hear “cancer,” they often think only of breast cancer. But the American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that in 1998 colorectal cancer will kill 24,600 women in the U.S., and 90 percent of people usually diagnosed with this cancer are older than 50. In addition to having a rectal exam during your annual trip to the gynecologist, you should have a fecal occult blood test (in which your doctor checks for blood in a stool sample) every year after you turn 50, according to the ACS. The ACS also suggests a sigmoidoscopy (in which the doctor inspects your lower large intestine for precancerous growths) every five years. In some cases, your doctor might recommend a colonoscopy, which will allow her to examine the entire large intestine.

**COST:** Fecal occult blood test \$20–\$30; sigmoidoscopy \$200–\$300; colonoscopy \$1,300–\$1,400

BILL CARDON/Liaison International





BETH PHILLIPS

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that taking in more **folate**—in food or from supplements—can help women reduce their risk of coronary heart disease. The results suggest that any increase in folate intake will help lessen the risk of heart disease, but your best bet is to have a daily intake of at least 400 micrograms.

### Risk of Developing Breast Cancer in the Next Year

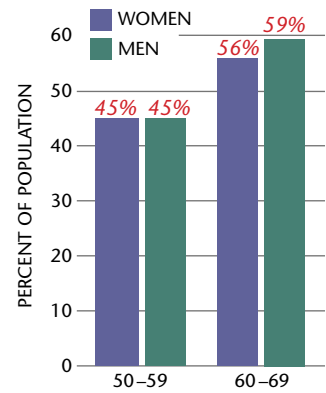
Age	Risk
50–54	1 in 450
55–59	1 in 386
60–64	1 in 292
65–69	1 in 244

(National Cancer Institute)



CHRIS PRIEST SPL/Photo Researchers, Inc.

### ESTIMATED PREVALENCE OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES IN THE U.S.



SOURCE: 1998 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update, American Heart Association

### October is *National Breast Cancer Awareness Month*.

Many facilities lower mammogram fees, extend their hours and offer special classes during this time. Watch for flyers and take advantage of the opportunities.

**F**eeling low? Some 20 percent of women in the developed world suffer from **DEPRESSION**. If you are diagnosed with depression, your doctor can prescribe antidepressant medication or refer you to a psychotherapist. For more information about depression, call the National Foundation for Depressive Illness at 800-248-4344.

#### ✓ MAMMOGRAM

There's not nearly as much controversy about mammograms for women in their 50s and 60s as there is for younger women: both the American Cancer Society and the American Medical Association recommend annual mammograms after you turn 50; the National Cancer Institute (NCI) recommends being tested once every one to two years. False positives can still be problematic, however: the NCI reports that 86 percent of American women older than 50 who have had abnormal mammograms received at least one false positive result.

**COST: \$50–\$150**

#### ✓ PELVIC EXAM AND PAP TEST

Over half the women older than 55 do not have annual Pap tests, yet 60 percent of cervical cancers are diagnosed in women of this age group.

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

#### ✓ HEARING TEST

Loss of hearing as people grow older is completely natural, and although there is no way to stop the process, your doctor may still be of some help. Your regular physician can determine the physical cause of hearing loss and may refer you to a specialist if necessary. A hearing aid will amplify sounds entering your ear and will reduce stress on your aging inner ear. Have your hearing tested immediately if you suspect hearing loss. To find a hearing specialist in your area, call the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at 800-638-8255.

**COST: \$10–\$100**

#### ✓ BONE DENSITY EXAM

One out of every two women older than 50 fractures a bone made brittle from the onset of osteoporosis, a disease characterized by loss of bone density. A doctor can x-ray your hips, spine or wrists with low-level radiation to detect bone loss and recommend hormone therapy or other drugs, diet changes or exercise to increase the mass and strength of your bones. Ask your doctor when and how often you should have your bone density measured.

To learn more about osteoporosis prevention and treatment, visit the National Osteoporosis Foundation at <http://www.nof.org> on the World Wide Web. To find a bone-density testing location in your area, call the National Osteoporosis Foundation's Official Action Line at 800-464-6700.

**COST: \$100–\$300. Medicare pays in some states. But beware, not all private insurers will cover this test; ask before you go to the doctor.**

#### ✓ EYE EXAM

Is your vision blurry or spotty? Many symptoms of eye disease and loss of vision are not apparent until conditions such as glaucoma or cataracts become more advanced. Glaucoma, for example, is one of the leading causes of blindness in the U.S. and occurs most often in people over 40; cataracts are most common in people over 55. The American Optometric Association recommends an eye exam at least every two years for adults between the ages of 41 and 60. After age 60 you should have your eyes examined annually.

Treatment can slow or stop eyesight loss, and taking care of your eyes now can help prevent problems later. Make sure you have plenty of light when reading and wear sunglasses that block ultraviolet radiation when you are outdoors.

**COST: \$50–\$100**

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