

Simple Health Steps for Women in Their 40s & 50s

WebMD Medical Reference

1. Revisit your contraceptive method.

"If you've been on oral contraceptives, as you get older you may want to consider switching to an IUD or other method, due to cardiovascular risk factors," says JoAnn Manson, chief of the division of preventive medicine at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. Birth control pills are linked to a protein that may increase some women's risk of heart disease.

2. Manage menopause.

One day, it's birth control; the next, it's hot flashes. Welcome to midlife. Talk to your doctor before menopausal symptoms kick in and discuss what you might want to do. "If you have moderate to severe menopausal symptoms and are at low risk for breast cancer and heart disease, short-term hormonal therapy might be right for you," says Manson.

3. Keep an eye on your calcium.

As you're moving into menopause, it's a critical time for women to preserve bone health and stave off osteoporosis. If you don't get enough dairy in your diet, take a twice-daily supplement with calcium and vitamin D. Often overlooked, vitamin D is the key that unlocks the calcium so your body can use it. Ask your doctor whether you should have a bone density scan to screen for early osteoporosis.

4. Don't forget key screening tests.

Make sure you get regular mammograms starting at age 40, diabetes screening starting at 45, and a colonoscopy at age 50 (earlier if you're at high risk). Also since thyroid disease is common in older women, ask your doctor whether you should consider a thyroid screening.

SOURCE: JoAnn Manson, chief, division of preventive medicine, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston.