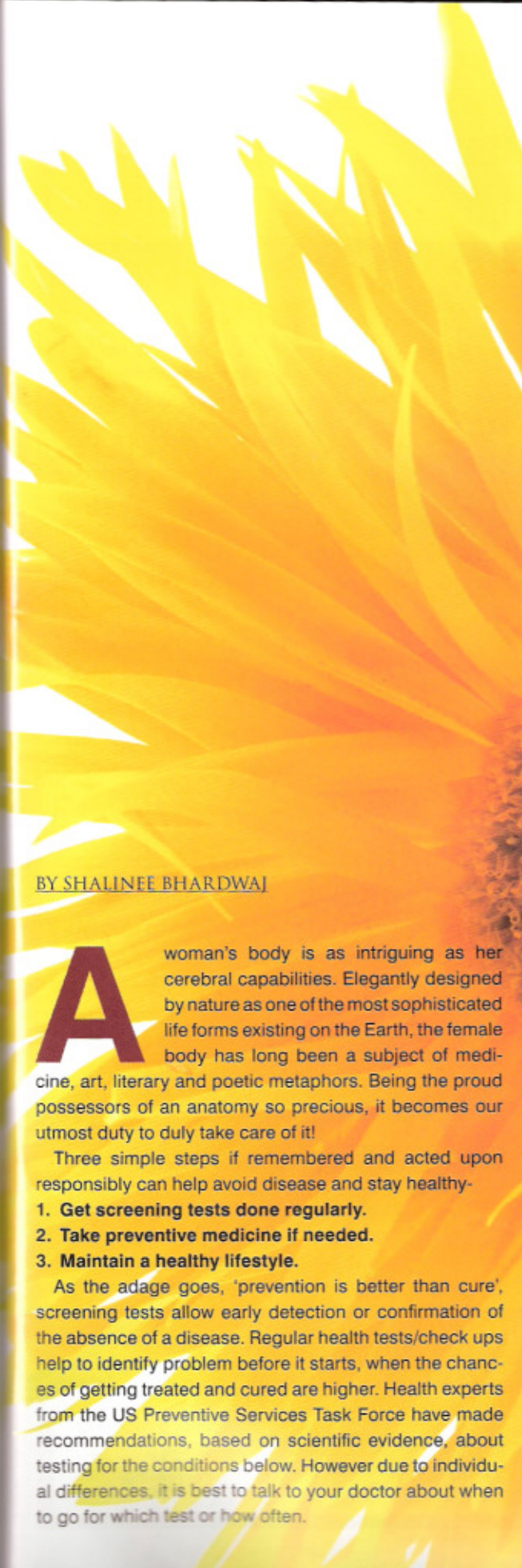




HEALTH&FITNESS

Your

Mind
Body!



BY SHALINEE BHARDWAJ

A woman's body is as intriguing as her cerebral capabilities. Elegantly designed by nature as one of the most sophisticated life forms existing on the Earth, the female body has long been a subject of medicine, art, literary and poetic metaphors. Being the proud possessors of an anatomy so precious, it becomes our utmost duty to duly take care of it!

Three simple steps if remembered and acted upon responsibly can help avoid disease and stay healthy-

1. **Get screening tests done regularly.**
2. **Take preventive medicine if needed.**
3. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.**

As the adage goes, 'prevention is better than cure', screening tests allow early detection or confirmation of the absence of a disease. Regular health tests/check ups help to identify problem before it starts, when the chances of getting treated and cured are higher. Health experts from the US Preventive Services Task Force have made recommendations, based on scientific evidence, about testing for the conditions below. However due to individual differences, it is best to talk to your doctor about when to go for which test or how often.

Colorectal Cancer:

Have a test for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. Your doctor can help you decide which test is right for you. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, you may need to be screened earlier.

HIV

Have a test to screen for HIV infection if you:

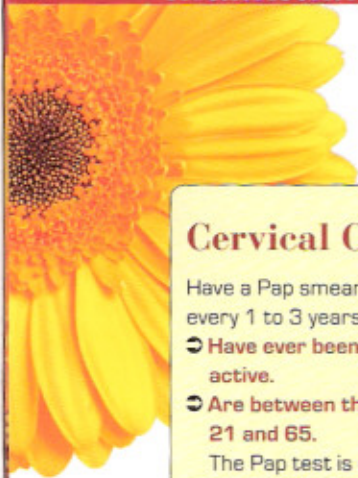
- **Have used or now use injection drugs.**
- **Have had unprotected sex with multiple partners.**
- **Are pregnant.**
- **Are being treated for sexually transmitted diseases.**

In Qatar, the National Campaign for the Early Detection of Cancer aims at raising awareness about the importance of early detection and prevention of cancer and enlists Early Warning Symptoms, some of which are as follows:

- **Skin ulcers or sores that do not heal with regular treatment within two weeks.**
- **Wart, mole blackens or starts to itch or bleed or becomes infected.**
- **Continuous hoarseness or a change in voice that does not fade in a short period of time.**
- **Persistent cough.**
- **Lump or tumour in the breast or a change in the form or size of one of the breasts, change in the skin of the breast in the form of a depression or bleeding of the nipple.**
- **Blood in urine, swollen stomach or the presence of a lump or persistent pain.**
- **Abnormal bleeding from the uterus.**

Diabetes:

Have a test for diabetes if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol. And also if there is a history of diabetes in your family. Women who have had gestational diabetes, need to watch their diet and lifestyle.



Cervical Cancer

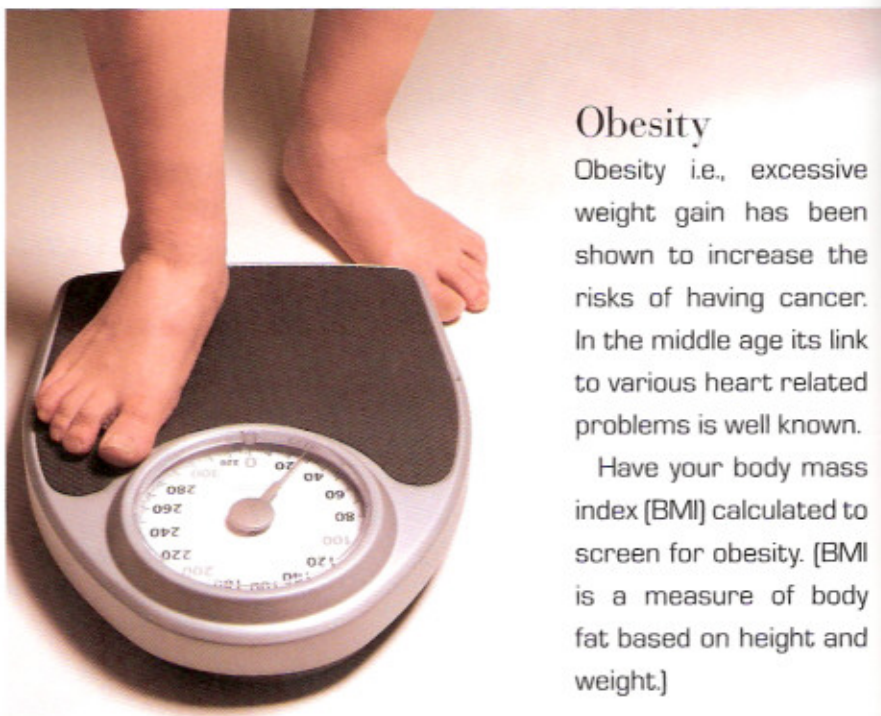
Have a Pap smear done every 1 to 3 years if you:

- **Have ever been sexually active.**
- **Are between the ages of 21 and 65.**

The Pap test is one of the most reliable and effective cancer screening tests available.

It also can find other conditions that might need treatment, such as infection or inflammation.

In addition to the Pap test – the main test for cervical cancer – the HPV test may be used for screening women aged 30 years and older, or women of any age who have unclear Pap test results.



Obesity

Obesity i.e., excessive weight gain has been shown to increase the risks of having cancer. In the middle age its link to various heart related problems is well known.

Have your body mass index (BMI) calculated to screen for obesity. (BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight.)

Breast Cancer

Risk factors for breast cancer include the following:

- **Older age.**
- **Menstruating at an early age.**
- **Older age at first birth or never having given birth.**
- **A personal history of breast cancer or benign (non cancer) breast disease.**
- **A mother or sister with breast cancer.**
- **Drinking alcoholic beverages.**
- **Routine breast self-examination should be performed to detect any abnormalities or change in form and structure of the breasts.**
- **Have a mammogram done every 1 to 2 years starting at age 40. However if you have a family history of breast cancer, the test should be started earlier.**

High Cholesterol

Have your cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 45. If you are younger than 45, talk to your doctor about whether to have your cholesterol checked if:

- **You have diabetes.**
- **You have high blood pressure.**
- **Heart disease runs in your family.**
- **You smoke.**

Anaemia

Symptoms such as paleness, weakness, fatigue, and low blood pressure suggest anaemic condition.

Get regular blood tests done to measure the level of haemoglobin (the oxygen carrying pigment) in the blood as well as substances such as folic acid, bilirubin and vitamin B12.

High Blood Pressure :

Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years.

High blood pressure is

**140/90
or
higher.**

Life saving routine

Women are the soul bearers of the family; their health and well keep is extremely vital.

Women must maintain a health chart, putting down the schedule of their health checks/tests after consultation with their doctor and follow it up responsibly.

The US Department of Health and Human Services proposes a daily health routine for women:

Eat Healthy

Include a greater proportion of fresh fruits, green vegetables in your diet. It is said that the more colourful the food in your plate appears, the more nutritious your diet is! (Of course the colouring is not supposed to be artificial!) Consume less saturated fat, iron rich vegetables, eat a balanced diet and watch how much you eat.

Maintain a healthy weight

Eat better, get regular exercise, and see your health care provider about any health concerns to make sure you are on the right track to staying healthy.

Get moving

For adults, thirty minutes of moderate physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week is recommended. It doesn't take a lot of time or money, but it does take commitment. Start slowly, work up to a satisfactory level, and don't overdo it. You can

develop one routine, or you can do something different every day. Find fun ways to stay in shape and feel good, such as dancing, gardening, swimming, walking, or jogging.

Be smoke free

Health concerns associated with smoking include cancer, lung disease, early menopause, infertility, and pregnancy complications. Smoking triples the risk of dying from heart disease among those who are middle-aged. Second-hand smoke – smoke that you inhale when others smoke – also affects your health. If you smoke, quit today!

Manage stress

Balancing obligations to your employer and your family can be challenging. Protect your mental and physical health by engaging in activities that help you manage your stress at work and at home.

Be good to yourself

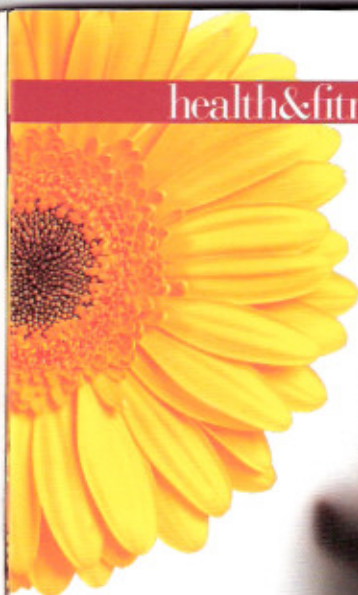
Health is not merely the absence of disease; it's a lifestyle. Whether it's getting enough sleep, relaxing after a stressful day, or enjoying a hobby, it's important to take time to be good to yourself. Take steps to balance work, home, and play. Pay attention to your health, and make healthy living a part of your life.



Sources:

Dr Kusum Arora, Gynaecologist, Apollo Clinic, Doha, Qatar

Web citations: Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta. <http://www.cdc.gov/women/> National Campaign for Early Detection of Cancer, Qatar)



Osteoporosis or Thinning of the Bones

It refers to a serious condition that leads to increased risk of bone fractures. The bones become porous like sponge, fragile and brittle. Given its influence on the risk of fragility, osteoporosis may significantly affect life expectancy and quality of life. Risk factors or causes of osteoporosis include:

- **Aging**
- **Menopause before age 48**
- **Insufficient intake of calcium**
- **Sedentary lifestyle, not getting enough exercise**
- **Smoking and/or alcohol abuse**
- **Low body weight**
- **Hyperthyroidism**
- **Long term use of certain steroids**

You may not know you have osteoporosis until you have serious signs that include frequent incidence of fractures, low back pain or a hunched back. You may also get shorter over time because osteoporosis can cause your vertebrae (the bones in your spine) to collapse. These problems tend to occur and remain undetected after a lot of bone calcium has already been lost.

Get bone density test done to screen for osteoporosis, after consulting with your physician.

Mental Health

A woman's body experiences a complex interplay of hormones during different phases of "growing up". Any imbalance leads to varied reactions in the body.

Causes of mental ill health can be:

- **Physical** – mainly related to reproductive function of a woman's body. (Pre-menstrual mood swings and anxiety, pregnancy, postpartum/after child birth depression, issues related to breast feeding, menopause)
- **Psycho social** – related to family affairs, relationships and emotions.
- **Mental ill health induced by a stressed out working environment.**

Broadly the symptoms to watch out for are mood swings, anger, irritability, anxiety, depression, sensitivity to rejection, sense of feeling overwhelmed, social withdrawal. Physical Symptoms include-

- **Lethargy or fatigue**
- **Sleep disturbance**
- **Appetite disturbances**
- **Headaches**

The best way to handle this issue is to be aware of and appreciative of your body functions, its needs and changes. Do not hesitate to talk to your gynaecologist or psychiatrist or with friends and elders. Create a stress free environment around yourself and 'Stop complaining for being born as a woman!'

