

Breast Health

Bone Health

Mental + Emotional Health

Your Health-Check Journey

Check in on your check-ups

It can be hard to take proper care of our health when we're busy. However, maintaining it, rather than fixing it when something goes wrong (yes, just like a car) is the easiest and best option. How? With regular health checks.

This booklet is designed to be a 'road map' through your essential physical health checks, at every life stage. But of course, your body isn't the only thing you need to care for.

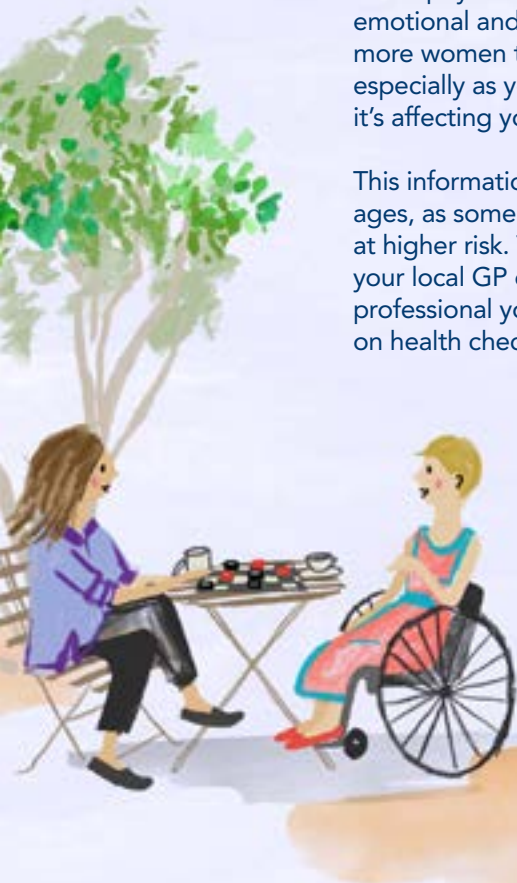
While physical checks can vary over time, checking our emotional and mental health must be a constant. In general, more women than men suffer from depression and anxiety, especially as young adults. So if you feel out of sorts, and it's affecting your daily life, don't be afraid to ask for help.

This information is just a guide to health checks at different ages, as some checks may be more frequent for women at higher risk. To understand your specific needs, start with your local GP or community health centre. Find a health professional you trust, and who listens to you. To learn more on health checks, from A-Z, visit us at jeanhailes.org.au

Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. This booklet generally uses the terms 'women' and 'girls'. These terms are intended to include women with diverse sexualities, intersex women, and women with a transgender experience.

About the artist

Luci Everett is an illustrator, graphic designer and artist living in Melbourne, Australia.



Starting out

Hello hormones! When girls begin the journey into womanhood – most from ages 8 to 12 – it's a time of excitement, but also one of challenge and confusion. There's a lot going on, as bodies begin to change; periods begin, hair appears in new places and the first inklings of desire make themselves known.

Young bodies need to be as well prepared as possible for the years ahead. So now is the time to establish good habits. This includes getting plenty of dietary calcium and sunshine for bone building, establishing physical activity as an enjoyable lifetime pursuit and building confidence to meet life's challenges.

For most girls, this time also brings the first routine 'jab' since childhood vaccinations – the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine.

✓ YOUR HEALTH CHECKS

HPV VACCINE. To protect children from HPV in adulthood, and reduce the risk of cervical, penile, anal and throat cancer, the National HPV Vaccination Program is administered for free to girls and boys aged 12-13 years. The vaccine is most effective when given at this stage, before sexual activity has begun and when the body produces more antibodies.

PERIODS. At first, periods can be quite unpredictable – heavy, light, irregular, or painful – before they settle into a more regular pattern. But see your doctor if:

- you have not had your first period (called menarche) by age 16-17
- periods are so painful and/or heavy that you cannot go to school or work.



Making your way

You're a grown woman now, as the teen years make way for the 20s. You may be heading off to university or TAFE, starting your first full-time job, or even thinking of starting your own family. So yes, you may also be sexually active.

Many women think of 'safe sex' as simply being careful not to fall pregnant. But it's not just about contraception. It's also about protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The HPV vaccine offers good protection from HPV, but what about chlamydia? Herpes? HIV? Gonorrhoea?

STIs can not only affect your day-to-day health, but your future fertility. You can't tell if someone has an STI just by looking. So regular checks are important.

✓ YOUR HEALTH CHECKS

CERVICAL SCREENING. From the age of 25, if you have a cervix and have been sexually active with a person of any gender, you need to have a Cervical Screening Test (the replacement for the Pap test). After that, you will only need to be tested every five years **if your results are normal.**

CONTRACEPTION. You have quite a few choices. Talk to your doctor about what method of contraception is right for you.

PERIODS. If they are so painful you cannot go to study or work, and/or your flow is so heavy that you regularly 'flood', see your doctor. Treatments are available.

SEXUAL HEALTH CHECK-UP. Unprotected sex with your regular partner will only be safe as long as you are only having sex with each other, and you've both tested negative for STIs. Otherwise, get an STI test annually. And always use condoms or dental dams with a new sexual partner.



Life's a juggle

By now, as a 20 or 30-something, you may have a full dance card – the career, the mortgage, the children. And amid all your family and work commitments, you're still trying to maintain your own personal and social needs. You may find yourself asking: 'how did I get this busy?'

Who's looking after **you**?

Amid the juggle of life's demands, it can be easy to let your regular health checks slide. But all these checks now need to be on your schedule. Every year. Every woman is different, but the rule of thumb for any health check is to be aware of any change in your body that is **not normal for you**.

Remember, if you're in good health, the rest of your family benefits. So put yourself first. It's not selfish – it's sensible.

YOUR HEALTH CHECKS

BLOOD PRESSURE. Every two years.

BLOOD SUGAR. Every three years (more for those at higher risk).

BREAST SELF-EXAM. Every month, check for any changes: lumps, dimpling, rashes, pain, or discharge from the nipple.

CERVICAL SCREENING. Every five years **if your results are normal**.

CHOLESTEROL. Every two years for those at higher risk.

SKIN CHECKS. Every year. There's some reminders of childhood summer holidays you can do without. Early detection of skin cancer is key to its successful treatment.



Find out more about health checks for women aged 20 to 40

Mighty midlife

So, the 40s and 50s are the new 30s and 40s, right? With improved awareness of health and nutrition, many of us are reaching midlife in better shape than our mums did. However, there's still one unavoidable health event – menopause. You may breeze through it, but if symptoms affect your quality of life, don't endure them – see your doctor. If you are postmenopausal, ask your doctor about an annual bone health check.

No matter how well you feel, there are still some health checks that become vital once you turn 50. Depending on your family history, you may already be having them.



YOUR HEALTH CHECKS

BLOOD SUGAR. Every three years (more for those at high risk).

BOWEL CANCER SCREENING. Every two years from age 50. Most people in Australia are now mailed a free home testing kit by the Australian Government around the time of their 50th birthday. Um, happy birthday!

BREAST SCREENING. Every two years from age 50. A breast X-ray, or mammogram, can detect changes that are too small for you or your doctor to feel. These are freely available at many convenient locations, through BreastScreen Australia. Don't put it off. Breast cancer is most common in women aged over 50.

BREAST SELF-EXAM. Every month.

CARDIOVASCULAR SCREENING. Cardiovascular disease is one of the main causes of death of women in Australia. This means two-yearly blood pressure tests and, from age 45, five-yearly cholesterol tests, at a minimum.

CERVICAL SCREENING. Every five years if your results are normal.

SKIN CHECKS. Every year.



New horizons

Forget the twilight years, or 'slowing down'. Many women reach their 60s and 70s and are still working, which might include being a 'granny nanny'.

Others may finally have the time to do all those things that they wished for years they could do. Travel. Return to study. Join a book club. Hike. Learn to play the saxophone!

It's in your best interests to be as healthy and active as possible. You'll still need your regular health checks of the past few decades – cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, skin checks, mammograms, bowel screening and, until you're 74, cervical screening – but now your focus needs to be very much on **cardiovascular, bone and brain health**.

✓ YOUR HEALTH CHECKS

BONE HEALTH. Bones lose strength as we age, which can lead to conditions such as osteopenia and osteoporosis. Nearly two million Australians currently have an osteoporosis-related condition – and three quarters of these are women. If you are concerned about your bone health, discuss an assessment with your doctor.

BRAIN HEALTH. You can reduce your risk of dementia by staying physically, mentally and socially active – so go for a walk, do volunteer work and make new friends. Ensure your diet is rich in foods proven to aid brain function, such as fruit, vegies and oily fish. Taking up a new hobby is good for brain health too.

CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH. This is now more important than ever, due to the increased risk to your heart with ageing. How often you have your checks will depend on your individual level of risk.



Jean Hailes for Women's Health provides trusted and easy-to-understand information to help you make decisions about your health.

We use the latest research to provide information and resources on a range of topics:

- bladder and bowel
- bone health
- breast health
- cardiovascular health
- endometriosis
- fertility and pregnancy
- health checks
- healthy living
- Indigenous health
- menopause
- mental and emotional health
- natural therapies and supplements
- polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- periods
- sex and sexual health
- vulva, vagina, ovaries and uterus.

Visit jeanhailes.org.au:



for practical ideas to improve your health



for free resources including videos, podcasts and recipes



to sign up for our magazine and email updates

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This booklet is informed by guidelines from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

Disclaimer This resource is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice, or replace advice from your health practitioner.

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