

# PINK OF HEALTH

For women, one of the biggest concerns in life is staying healthy and being financially prepared for uncertainties. We discuss common women-related illnesses with Dr Wee Siew Bock – Breast and Endocrine Surgeon from ParkwayHealth Group. Dr Wee shares his insights on preventive methods, plus tips to put you on a clean slate of health.



**Q: What are the top 3 illnesses that affect women?**

**A:** The most common illnesses that women are diagnosed with include breast cancer, heart disease and colorectal cancer.

**Q: For each of the illnesses, what are the key symptoms?**

**A:** Many of the main symptoms are not specific to the illness and can be due to other mild ailments. However, it is important to understand your own body and seek medical attention if the symptoms are persistent.

- **Breast Cancer** – You find a lump, unusual persistent area of hardening in the breast or experience blood-stained nipple discharge.
- **Heart Disease** – You experience chest pain or discomfort, increasing discomfort or shortness of breath with exertion or exercise.
- **Colorectal Cancer** – You notice sudden changes in your bowel habits, blood in or blood-staining of stools and abdominal bloating or discomfort.

**Q: How do we prevent these illnesses?**

**A:** To prevent breast cancer, do regular breast self-examination at least once a month so you have general awareness of breast changes. Keep to a low-fat diet and go for mammograms.

Keeping a healthy, low-fat, low-salt diet combined with regular exercise is the key to preventing heart disease. If you have hypertension, keep your blood pressure in check.

Lastly, the way to stay clean of colorectal cancer is to go with a high-fibre, low-meat diet and maintain regular bowel habits.

**Q: What type of body check-up is necessary for women? How often should it be done?**

**A: Breast Cancer** – Do monthly breast self-examinations at home to check for any irregularities or hardened lumps. Women above the age of 40 need to go for annual mammograms and breast ultrasound scans.

**Heart Disease** – It's good to have an awareness of blood pressure levels with every visit to the doctor so as to treat any hypertension early. Have an annual heart evaluation by your family doctor. This is usually inclusive of blood tests and ECGs, as well as additional tests like treadmill stress tests or heart scans as directed by the doctor.

**Colorectal Cancer** – Faecal occult blood tests should be done annually if you are above the age of 40. Those above 50-years-old should consider going for a thorough colonoscopy. These tests can be repeated at intervals, depending on findings and risk profile

**Q: Why are women more susceptible to a greater variety of illnesses as compared to men?**

**A:** I don't think women are more susceptible to a greater range of illnesses compared to men. However it might seem so, possibly due to the fact that women are more willing to go for health screenings. Dramatic phases in life such as the onset of menopause can give rise to specific ailments related to menopause itself, like osteoporosis. This in turn creates a multitude of bodily changes which bring any ailment to attention immediately.

**Q: If afflicted, other than receiving regular medical treatment, are there any self-help groups or specialised organisations that women can seek help from?**

**A:** There are many local and online support groups that provide crucial, non-medical, psycho-social and emotional help for ladies diagnosed with these conditions. Cancer support groups are mostly based in the hospitals or with organisations like the Singapore Cancer Society and Breast Cancer Foundation.

These groups comprise a mix of professionals like rehabilitation therapists, nurse counsellors and non-professionals, usually cancer survivors. Affected women are welcomed into experience-sharing sessions, given appropriate advice and encouraged to participate in various activities; all with the aim of facilitating a return to normal life after treatment.

**Q: Are there any healthy living tips that you would like to share with our female readers?**

**A:** Generally, live life in moderation. Healthy living can easily be achieved with a low-fat, low-meat, high-calcium, low-salt diet. Decrease your intake of preserved foods. In addition, maintain appropriate stress level with adequate rest and sleep. Regular exercise is essential for building a strong physique and is great as a stress-buster too. Lastly, maintenance of a steady body weight is important, especially after menopause.

**Learn Did you know?**

- Women have a higher life expectancy than men. On average, woman live 5 years longer than men. Statistics from World Population Data 2008 indicate that the life expectancy for Singapore males is 78 years and 83 years for females.
- Women suffer from more serious illnesses in old age. Research shows that women have 12 disability-filled years in the later part of life, compared to men who only have 9.

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