


AmeriHealth Caritas
District of Columbia

Women's Health Guide

January 2026



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Women's bodies can do unique and amazing things.

Understanding Women's Health

Women have special health needs throughout their lives. While women's bodies can do unique and amazing things, women are also at greater risk for a number of health conditions that are less common in men, such as autoimmune diseases, breast cancer, osteoporosis, stroke, and thyroid diseases.¹

Regular screenings, preventative care, and healthy habits can help you live a longer, healthier life. This guide explains the care you should receive at every stage and how AmeriHealth Caritas DC can support you.

1. <https://www.adventhealth.com/blog/12-medical-conditions-impact-women-more-men>

Why You Need Primary Care and an OB/GYN



From childhood through adulthood, it's critical to see your primary care provider (PCP) each year for a checkup. Your PCP looks after your overall health, including lifestyle, chronic conditions, and general illnesses. They also help ensure you stay up to date on your vaccinations, such as the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine that protects against cancers caused by HPV infections.²

As a woman, it's also important to have a well-woman exam with an OB/GYN. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends girls have their first visit to an OB/GYN between ages 13 and 15.³ This visit gives teens the opportunity to discuss their development, and any questions related to the female reproductive system or their sexual health.

These visits should continue each year throughout a woman's life to monitor health, address any concerns, and discuss birth control, family planning, and preventative care. Screenings such as pelvic exams and Pap tests are generally recommended to begin at age 21, but your OB/GYN can help determine the best timing for you.⁴

Women should have both a physical and a well-woman exam on a yearly basis to get the best care possible. If you need help finding an OB/GYN, PCP, or scheduling an appointment, call the AmeriHealth Caritas DC Community Outreach team at **(202) 216-2318**. We can help you find the provider that you will feel most comfortable with.

2. <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccines/reasons-to-get.html>

3. <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2020/10/the-initial-reproductive-health-visit>

4. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/4267-pap-smear>



Breast exams are important to check for signs of breast cancer.

What to Expect at Your Well-Woman Visit



Your OB/GYN may do things differently depending on your age, your health status, and other factors, but typically you can expect:⁵

- 1. Medical History** – Your provider will review your medical history and ask about medications, family history, menstrual cycles, pregnancies, and lifestyle.
- 2. Wellness Screening** – Height, weight, heart, and blood pressure checks.
- 3. Breast Exam** – Checking for lumps, swelling, or changes that may be a sign of breast cancer. **Breast cancer** is a kind of cancer that begins as a growth of cells in the breast tissue.
- 4. Pelvic Exam** – Looking for symptoms of disease in your reproductive organs.
- 5. Pap Test** – Collecting cells from your cervix to screen for HPV (**human papillomavirus**) and cervical cancer. **Cervical cancer** is a growth of cells that starts in the cervix.
- 6. STI Testing** – Testing for HIV and other infections, if needed.

5. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/well-woman-exam>

Menstrual Health



During a well-woman visit, your OB/GYN will likely ask you for the date of your last period. This is a standard question to track your menstrual cycle and help assess your overall reproductive health. An unusual change in your cycle could indicate a medical condition that needs to be addressed. This question also helps an OB/GYN determine if you could be pregnant.

Therefore, it is important to regularly track your periods. You should mark the first day of your period on a calendar, note the length of your period (number of days bleeding), and record any unusual symptoms. There are tracker tools and apps you can use online or on your phone if it's helpful to you.

It's important to track your periods — mark the first day, length of your cycle, and any unusual symptoms.

Birth Control

Birth control comes in many forms, such as pills, patches, IUDs, and implants. The primary purpose of birth control is to prevent unintended pregnancies. However, birth control can also:⁶

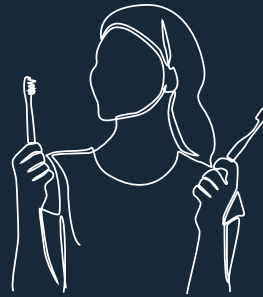
- **Help** regulate your menstrual cycle.
- **Reduce** menstrual cramps and other painful symptoms associated with menstruation (your period).
- **Improve** skin conditions, such as acne.
- **Reduce** the risk of ovarian cysts and certain cancers.
- **Help** manage conditions such as **endometriosis** and PCOS (**polycystic ovary syndrome**).

If you have questions about birth control, wish to start or stop using birth control, or need help determining which birth control method is right for you, you should discuss this with your OB/GYN.

6. <https://www.healthline.com/health/birth-control-benefits#menstrual-cycle>



Prenatal care within the first three months of your pregnancy is very important.



Pregnancy

If you are planning for a family or think you might be pregnant, your OB/GYN is a great resource. They can give advice to help you live a healthy lifestyle and prepare for pregnancy.

If you think you might be pregnant, go see your OB/GYN right away. They can confirm the pregnancy with a blood test. You will need regular visits with your OB/GYN during pregnancy and after giving birth.

Oral health is especially important during pregnancy. Pregnant women are at risk of oral health conditions that could be harmful to their own health and the future of their baby.⁷ Be sure to keep up with good oral hygiene by brushing and flossing your teeth every day. You should also continue your regular dental visits while pregnant.

Bright Start® is the AmeriHealth Caritas DC maternity care program that helps pregnant enrollees make healthy choices for themselves and their babies. Scan the QR code or call **1-877-759-6883** to learn more.

7. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6883753/>



Menopause is a natural part of aging.

Menopause and Midlife Health

Menopause is a natural part of aging, usually occurring between the ages of 45 and 55 years old.⁸ Menopause marks the end of a woman's reproductive years. Symptoms associated with menopause vary by person, but may include hot flashes, difficulty sleeping/insomnia, or changes in mood.

Talk with your OB/GYN about symptoms and treatment options for menopause.

8. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/menopause>



Prioritizing Women's Health at Every Age

Different preventative screenings are recommended throughout a woman's life as she ages. The table shows a sample of generally recommended screening guidelines for women with no risk factors.⁹

You do not need to remember these guidelines. Your provider will help you. If you are at high risk for any of these diseases, your provider may suggest you are screened more often. You may also need additional screenings that are not shown in the table. Your provider will help decide what's best for you.

9. https://www.ucsfhealth.org/-/media/project/ucsf/ucsf-health/pdf/womens_health_passport_chart.pdf



Your provider will help decide what's best for you.

SCREENING GUIDELINES

SCREENING TESTS	AGES 18-39	AGES 40-49	AGES 50-64	AGES 65+
GENERAL HEALTH				
Focused checkup, including weight & height	Discuss with your healthcare provider	Discuss with your healthcare provider	Discuss with your healthcare provider	Discuss with your healthcare provider
Thyroid Test (TSH)			Every 5 years	Every 5 years
HEART HEALTH				
Blood Pressure	Starting at age 21, then once every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years
Cholesterol Test		Every 5 years	Every 5 years	Every 5 years
Bone Health				Obtain once, discuss with provider
DIABETES				
Blood Sugar Test		Starting at age 45, then every 3 years	Every 3 years	Every 3 years
BREAST HEALTH				
Breast Exam	Yearly by provider; monthly self-breast exam	Yearly by provider; monthly self-breast exam	Yearly by provider; monthly self-breast exam	Yearly by provider; monthly self-breast exam
Mammogram (x-ray of breast)		Discuss with provider	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years

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SCREENING GUIDELINES

SCREENING TESTS	AGES 18-39	AGES 40-49	AGES 50-64	AGES 65+
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH				
Pap Test & Pelvic Exam	Every 1-3 years	Every 1-3 years	Every 1-3 years	Every 1-3 years
Chlamydia Test	If sexually active, yearly until age 25	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider
Other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider
COLORECTAL HEALTH				
Colonoscopy		Starting at age 45, then every 10 years	Every 10 years	Every 10 years
EYE AND EAR HEALTH				
Vision Exam	Once between age 20 and 39	Every 2-4 years	Every 2-4 years	Every 1-2 years
Hearing Test	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider
DENTAL				
Oral Exam	2 times every year	2 times every year	2 times every year	2 times every year
MENTAL HEALTH				
Mental Health Screening	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider	Discuss with your provider

Some mental health conditions are more common in women than men.



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Mental Health

Taking care of your mental health is just as important as caring for your physical health. Some mental health conditions are more common in women than men, including depression, anxiety disorders, and eating disorders.¹⁰ Speak to your PCP or OB/GYN if you are feeling depressed, anxious, or struggling with your mental health. You can also:

- Call the AmeriHealth Caritas DC Community Outreach Solutions team at **(202) 216-2318** for help finding a behavioral health provider.
- Chat via live text with a trained behavioral health coach right away. Visit <http://work.headspace.com/amerihealth/member-enroll> to get started.
- Call AmeriHealth Caritas DC Enrollee Services at **1-800-408-7511** or **TTY 1-800-570-1190** for addiction and recovery support.
- Visit www.amerihhealthcaritasdc.com/events to see when we are offering our next fitness class. People who exercise regularly have better mental wellness.
- Call or text the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** if you or someone you know is in crisis.

10. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/women-and-mental-health>



Safety and Support

During a well-woman visit, your OB/GYN may ask if you feel safe at home. This is because intimate partner violence and other safety issues can affect your health.

If you ever feel unsafe, know that support is available. You can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or text **“START”** to **88788**.

We're Here When You Need Us

Need specialized assistance related to your healthcare? Call AmeriHealth Caritas DC Complex Case Management at **(202) 408-2233**.



*We're here to help
you get care
and stay healthy.*

AmeriHealth Caritas District of Columbia complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex, including sex characteristics, including intersex traits; pregnancy or related conditions; sexual orientation; gender identity, and sex stereotypes (consistent with the scope of sex discrimination described at 45 CFR § 92.101(a)(2)). AmeriHealth Caritas District of Columbia does not exclude people or treat them less favorably because of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

English: If you do not speak and/or read English, please call **1-800-408-7511 (TTY 1-800-570-1190)**, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A representative will assist you.

Español: Si no habla y/o lee inglés, llame al **1-800-408-7511 (TTY 1-800-570-1190)**, línea disponible las 24 horas del día, los siete días de la semana. Un representante le ayudará.

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Tiếng Việt: Nếu quý vị không nói và/hoặc đọc Tiếng Anh, vui lòng gọi **1-800-408-7511 (TTY 1-800-570-1190)**, 24 giờ một ngày, bảy ngày một tuần. Sẽ có người đại diện hỗ trợ quý vị.

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