



STAYING HEALTHY AT ANY AGE

Caring for Women's Health

Women's strength and resilience has been demonstrated throughout history as the main caregivers in our community. Modern day demands on women, often balancing careers and family, mean that they frequently put the needs of others before their own, including their own health. Common health issues faced by women are listed below:

Tobacco & Alcohol

Approximately 6,000 Australian women die prematurely each year as a result of tobacco caused illness. Both smoking and passive smoking affect women's reproductive outcomes and a woman who smokes during pregnancy increases her risk of miscarriage and stillbirth. Babies have a greater risk of low birth weight, prematurity and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Alcohol is the most widely used social drug in Australia. Intake guidelines state that for women, drinking up to two standard drinks a day puts you at low risk, three to four standard drinks a day puts you at considerable risk, while five or more standard drinks a day is considered high risk for developing health problems. It is important to note that alcohol consumption during pregnancy may cause complications, as alcohol can harm the developing baby. For this reason, pregnant women are advised to drink no alcohol. Women who are breastfeeding are also advised to avoid drinking alcohol.

Cancer

Some cancers are specific to women including gynaecological cancers and others, like breast cancer, predominantly affect women and require gender specific programs. In Victoria, the most common cancers in women are breast, bowel, melanoma, lung and uterine.

Around 3,000 Victorian women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. Breasts undergo many changes in a woman's life due to puberty, the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, breastfeeding, changes in weight or ageing, so it is important for all women to get to know the normal look and feel of their breasts. By regularly checking your breasts, you may be able to recognise changes that could be a sign of breast cancer.

Every woman between 18 and 69 years of age who has ever had sex should have a Pap test every two years. Regular tests save more than 1,200 women from developing cervical cancer each year.

Heart Disease

The number of heart failure deaths in Australia is 1.5 times greater in women than men. Many women experience specific symptoms that are different from men including a sharp pain in the chest or no chest pain, rather than a feeling of pressure; unusual fatigue; unexplained blackouts; swelling in the ankles or legs and fluttering heartbeat. Due to this difference, symptoms are often less thoroughly detected in women. Women who smoke while taking the contraceptive pill greatly increase their risk of developing heart and blood vessel disease.

Diabetes

Women aged between 25-44 and over 75 years have a higher rate of diabetes than men. Between 2001 and 2006 there was a 68% increase in the prevalence of diabetes in the Greater Geelong area with 1 in 25 of the population diagnosed. This number is estimated to be at least double by including those not yet diagnosed with diabetes.

Left untreated, diabetes can lead to major health problems, such as blindness, kidney failure, heart disease, stroke and nerve damage. Pregnant women affected by gestational diabetes have a 50% higher risk of developing diabetes within the following 10 years. The key to avoiding these complications is early diagnosis, effective treatment and good self-management.

Violence Against Women

Intimate partner violence is responsible for more ill health, disability and premature death for women under 45 than high blood pressure, obesity and smoking. Depression in adult women is between three and four times higher if they have experienced sexual abuse as children or partner violence as adults.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Predominantly women bear the primary responsibility for contraception and while 90% of women aged 16-19 years use contraception to prevent pregnancy, the form of contraception is less likely to protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms remain the best barrier method to minimise the risk of contracting an STI. The rate of infection for Chlamydia is two times higher for women than men.

Mental Health

There are significant differences in the types of mental illness affecting women and men. Some of the most common mental illnesses include anxiety, depression, substance use disorder and

bipolar disorder. Depression is widely reported to be twice as common in women as men and eating disorders affect more women than men.

Mental health problems associated with pregnancy and childbirth have now been recognised as major public health issues with 15–25% of childbearing women likely to develop a clinically significant mental health disorder between conception and the end of the first postnatal year.

Women are more likely to suffer with more than one mental illness at a time, which is linked to increased severity of mental illness and increased disability. Indigenous Australian women commit suicide at nearly twice the rate of non-indigenous Australian women.

How can Barwon Health help?

Barwon Health has five major community health centres that provide a range of services to the Geelong region including; continence services, day respite, dental, home referral services, carer respite, community palliative care, continence, family planning, youth work, immunisation, podiatry, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, psychology/counselling, dietician, speech pathology, massage, community health nursing and regional palliative care.

How to contact your nearest Community Health Centre:

Anglesea	11 McMillan Street	5260 3901
Belmont	1-17 Reynolds Road	5260 3778
Corio	2 Gellibrand Street	5260 3800
Newcomb	104-108 Bellarine Hwy	5260 3333
Torquay	100 Surfcoast Hwy	5260 3900

Women's Health Clinics

These clinics operate from four community health sites and offer pap tests, information on breast care, emergency contraception, STI information and organising for testing, sexual and reproductive health education and referral to other agencies as necessary.

Belmont	5260 3778	By appointment
Corio	5260 3800	By appointment
Newcomb	5260 3333	
Drop in Monday 9am-12noon, otherwise by appointment		
Torquay	5260 3900	By appointment

Regional Women's Health Resource Service

Provides women's health information, events and links for women in the Barwon region. Phone 5260 3719 or 0419 322 560 or visit www.wholewoman.org.au

Pregnancy Care

Different models of pregnancy and postnatal care are available to suit your needs and these are listed below. For more information, contact Baxter Maternity Services on 5226 7511.

- Midwives clinic
- Midwifery Group Practice
- Shared Care with your General Practitioner
- Specialist clinics
- Young Approach to Pregnancy and Parenting (YAPP)
- Chemical Dependent Unit (CDU)
- Koori Midwife program
- Early Parenting Breastfeeding service.

Where to get more information & help

- Your doctor
- Barwon Health on 5226 7111 or www.barwonhealth.org.au
- Barwon Domestic Violence Outreach Service 5224 2903
- Barwon Centre Against Sexual Assault 5222 4318
- Raphael Centre-Ante & Post Natal Anxiety Counselling and Education 5221 7333
- 24 hour 'Nurse on Call 1300 606 024
- Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Sources: Barwon Health, Better Health Channel, Department of Human Services, Cancer Council Victoria, VicHealth, Diabetes Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Department of Health & Ageing, Women's Health Association of Victoria

"Staying healthy at any age" is a five part health promotion series produced quarterly by Barwon Health, promoting health services available in the Geelong region and is an initiative of the Barwon Health Community Engagement Committee. For more information or for copies of the fact sheets, please visit our website www.barwonhealth.org.au or contact 03 5226 7111.

