

# Arthritis (Osteoarthritis)

Arthritis is a disease of the joints. Painful, stiff joints are the most common signs of arthritis. Other signs are swelling, warmth, and redness in the joints. People often have trouble moving the joints normally.

Arthritis is a problem for many adults age 65 and older. About 42 million Americans have some form of arthritis. It can affect people of all ages and races.

## Why do people get arthritis?

- They put stress on the joints over time.
- They are overweight.
- It runs in their family.
- They are women. Women are affected 2 to 3 times more often than men.

## How can the doctor tell if I have arthritis?

This can be tricky. Other diseases can have the same signs. The doctor will:

- Ask about your health history.
- Do an exam and look at your joints.
- Order lab tests of blood or urine samples.
- Order X-rays or other tests to see inside the joints.

## Questions the doctor might ask:

- Is the pain in one or more joints?
- When do you have the pain?
- How long does the pain last?
- What were you doing when you first had the pain?
- Does moving around make the pain better or worse?
- Have you been sick or had any accidents?
- Has anyone in your family had arthritis?
- What drugs are you taking?
- Does anything make it better?

## What are the treatments?

- Rest
- Exercise
- Healthy diet
- Weight loss
- Medicines
- Heat and cold
- Injections
- Surgery
- Learning how to relax deeply
- Canes, splints, or other items to take stress off the joint



# Arthritis (Osteoarthritis)



## What can I do to help my doctor help me?

- Help plan your treatment.
- Ask questions.
- Understand your treatment plan.
- Follow directions for taking your medicine.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### **National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS)**

Phone: 301-495-4484 or 1-877-22-NIAMS (1-877-226-4267)

<http://www.niams.nih.gov>

# Allergies and Hay Fever

If you suffer from sneezing, runny noses, or itchy eyes, you might think you have a cold. Instead, it could be an allergy. When you come across something that you are allergic to, your body reacts with sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes. People can be allergic to many different things, such as

- Pollen
- Dust mites
- Animal dander
- Mold
- Foods
- Drugs

## Hay fever

Hay fever (pollen allergy) is one of the most common kinds of allergies. About 35 million Americans suffer from hay fever. Pollen is made by trees, grasses, and weeds. During the spring, summer, and fall some plants release pollen into the air you breathe. Your symptoms might be different at different times of the year. It all depends on the kinds of plants that grow where you live and what allergies you have.

## Symptoms of hay fever

- Sneezing
- Runny or clogged nose
- Coughing
- Itchy eyes, nose, and throat
- Watery eyes
- Red, swollen eyes

## What kinds of tests check for allergies?

- Skin tests—Your doctor may use a needle to put a small amount of allergen into your skin. After a few minutes, the reaction tells your doctor if you have allergies.
- Blood tests—Your doctor may use a blood test to look for a protein in your blood called IgE. This protein is made by people with allergies and hay fever. It also helps fight certain types of infection.

Both tests look for certain proteins (antibodies). Your body makes these proteins to match whatever it is fighting. Your antibodies tell doctors what you are allergic to.

## How are allergies and hay fever treated?

Your doctor can help you decide what to do. You can:

- Avoid the things that cause your symptoms.
- Use medicines.
- Get allergy shots.

Allergy shots contain small amounts of what you are allergic to. At first, shots may be given every week to lessen your symptoms. The shots are usually continued for 3-5 years.



# Allergies and Hay Fever

## Hay fever vs. colds

	Hay fever	Colds
Signs	Signs can include running or stuffed nose, sneezing, wheezing, itchy and watery eyes.	Signs can include fever, aches and pains, stuffed nose, sneezing, and watery eyes.
Warning time	Symptoms begin right away.	Symptoms usually take a few days to start.
Duration	Symptoms last as long as you are around the allergen.	Symptoms should clear up within a week.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

For information on air-cleaning devices:

### **Environmental Protection Agency**

Phone: 1-800-438-4318

<http://www.epa.gov>

# Asthma

Asthma is a disease of the lung airways. The airways get swollen and inflamed. They react easily to certain things, like viruses, smoke, or pollen. When the inflamed airways react, they get narrow. This makes it hard to breathe.

About 20 million Americans have asthma. Nearly five million are children. Many children outgrow asthma in their teen years. Each year, 5,000 people die from asthma. Asthma tends to run in the family.

Asthma is a chronic disease that can usually be managed with proper care.

## What are the signs of asthma?

Signs of asthma may include:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

## Many things may start or worsen an asthma attack including:

- Contact with allergy triggers (dust mites, cockroaches, animal dander)
- Colds and flu
- Cigarette or cigar smoke

- Outside pollution (chemicals or dirt in the air)
- Exercise
- Poor air quality
- Cold air

## At what age do people get asthma?

Some people get asthma as children. Asthma may or may not go away as children grow up. Other people get asthma later in life.

## I think I have asthma. What should I do?

See your doctor. Some tests your doctor may order include:

- Breathing tests
- Chest X-ray
- Tests to show whether breathing problems may be caused by allergies or heart disease

## How can asthma be treated?

There are many medicines used to treat asthma. The kind of drug used may depend on how bad your asthma is. There are prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs to treat asthma. Talk to your doctor about the best choice for you.



# Asthma

## How can I keep my asthma under control?

- See your doctor on a regular basis.
- Ask your doctor for a plan. Be sure to follow it.
- Watch for early signs and act fast.
- Stay away from things that make your asthma worse.

## How do I know the signs of trouble?

- Coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath gets much worse. This is called an “asthma attack.”
- You have trouble saying more than a few words at a time.
- You are struggling to breathe.

## What should I do if I see someone having an asthma attack?

- Stay calm.
- Find the person’s inhaler.
- Take the person away from smoke, pollution, and cold air.
- Call 911 if the person is still having trouble breathing.

**FDA Office of Women’s Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center**

Phone: 301-592-8573  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

# Diabetes

*Over nine million women in the U.S. have diabetes. And three million of them don't even know it!*

## Did you know that...?

- Diabetes increases the chances of having a heart attack or stroke.
- Some women get diabetes when they are pregnant.
- Women who have diabetes are more likely to have a miscarriage or a baby with birth defects.

## What is diabetes?

- Diabetes is a disease that changes the way your body uses sugar. The food you eat turns to sugar. The sugar then travels through the blood to all parts of the body. Usually, insulin helps get sugar from the blood to the body's cells, where it is used for energy.
- When you have diabetes, your body has trouble making and/or responding to insulin. So your body does not get the fuel it needs. And your blood sugar stays too high.

## What are the types of diabetes?

- **Type 1**—The body does not make any insulin. People with type 1 must take insulin every day to stay alive.
- **Type 2**—The body does not use insulin the way it should. Most people with diabetes have type 2.

## Are you at risk for diabetes?

- Do you need to lose weight?
- Do you get little or no exercise?
- Do you have high blood pressure (130/80 or higher)?
- Does diabetes run in your family?
- Are you a woman who had diabetes when you were pregnant?
- Have you had a baby who weighed more than nine pounds or more at birth?
- Are you African American, Native American, Hispanic, or Asian American/Pacific Islander?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist if you need a diabetes test.

## What are the warning signs?

Some people with diabetes notice:

- Going to the bathroom a lot
- Feeling hungry or thirsty all the time
- Blurred vision
- Cuts or bruises that are slow to heal
- Feeling tired all the time
- Hands or feet that tingle or feel numb

***Most people with diabetes do not notice any signs***



# Diabetes

## What can I do if I have diabetes?

### *Use medicines wisely*

- Sometimes people with diabetes need to take pills or insulin shots. Follow the directions.
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist what your medicines do. Also ask when to take them and if they have any side effects.

### *Watch what you eat and get exercise*

- There is no one diet for people with diabetes. Work with your health care team to come up with a plan for you.
- Be active at least 30 minutes a day, most days of the week. Exercise helps your body use insulin better.

## *Check your blood sugar and know your ABC's*

- Help prevent heart disease and stroke by keeping your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol under control.
- Check your blood sugar with a test you can use at home.
- Ask your doctor for an A-1-C (“A-one-see”) blood test. It checks blood sugar levels over 2 to 3 months.
- Talk to your health care team about your ABC's:

**A**-1-C

**B**lood pressure

**C**holesterol

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

**Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Diabetes Information**

<http://www.fda.gov/diabetes>



# The Flu

The flu is an illness caused by the flu (influenza) virus. The flu is usually worse than a cold. It attacks the nose, throat, and lungs and can cause mild to severe illness. The flu can sometimes lead to other problems like pneumonia, ear and sinus problems, dehydration, worsening of asthma, or sometimes even death. For most of us, the flu will go away in 1 to 2 weeks.

## How can I catch the flu?

- The flu is easily passed from person to person by coughing and sneezing.
- A person can also get the flu by touching something with the flu virus on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

## What are the signs of the flu?

- Fever
- Cough
- Feeling very tired
- Sore throat
- Headache and muscle ache
- Runny or stuffy nose

## Who is most at risk for more serious problems if they get the flu?

Everyone is at risk for getting the flu, but some people can get very sick. Those most at risk of serious problems include:

- Older adults.
- Very young children.
- Adults and children who have certain health problems like

heart or kidney disease, asthma, or diabetes.

- People with HIV/AIDS, cancer, or any health problem that makes it harder to fight off disease.
- People who live in nursing homes.

These people should call their doctor or clinic if they have flu-like symptoms.

## Health care workers should get a flu shot so they do not pass the flu to patients.

## What can I do to keep from getting the flu?

There is no way to make sure that you won't get the flu. But there are some steps you can take to lower your chances:

- Getting a flu shot or spray (vaccine) is the most important step to take. Get one every year. The best time to get it is in the fall before flu season starts. You can also get one in the winter at the peak of the flu season.
- Wash your hands often.
- Ask your doctor or clinic about drugs that can keep you from getting the flu. No medicine can take the place of the flu vaccine.

## What is a vaccine?

- A vaccine prepares your body in advance to fight disease. The flu vaccine can be a shot or a spray into your nose.



# The Flu

## What is the flu vaccine?

- The “flu shot” is made from a dead flu virus and is given with a needle, usually in the arm. It can be used in people older than 6 months of age.
- The nasal spray flu vaccine is made from a weakened form of the live flu virus and is sprayed in the nose. It can be used in people between the ages of 2 to 49 years.
- People who are allergic to eggs or who have had a reaction to the flu shot or vaccine should not be given the flu shot or nasal flu spray. Also, talk to your doctor if you have a history of Guillain-Barre’ syndrome.

## How well does the flu vaccine work?

- Every year the flu vaccine is changed to match the strains of virus that are most likely to be going around. The closer the match between the strains going around and the strains in the vaccine, the better the protection.
- It is always possible that the vaccine will not be an exact match to the strains that end up causing the most illness. It may still protect you, and may reduce symptoms and other problems that come from the flu.

## Are there drugs to treat the flu? Yes, there are a number of medicines that may help you feel better.

- Prescription medicines can lessen the time that you have symptoms. Your doctor or clinic can help you decide whether these drugs are right for you.

- Over-the-counter medicines can help with flu symptoms such as sore throat, stuffy nose, cough, fever, and body aches.

However:

- o Never give aspirin to children or teens who have signs of the flu. It can cause serious problems or even death. Call your doctor or clinic if your child is already taking aspirin for another reason and you think she or he has the flu.
- o If you already take any medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist which medicines you can use to safely treat flu symptoms. For example, some over-the-counter medicines to treat a stuffy nose (decongestants) can raise your blood pressure or even make your blood pressure medicines less effective.
- o No medicine can take the place of the flu vaccine.
- Many other diseases can feel like the flu, but they need different treatments. Always go to your doctor or clinic if you feel worse.

## What should I do if I get the flu?

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink lots of water or other liquids like juice and soup.
- Don’t smoke or drink alcohol.
- Don’t spread your germs. Cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then throw the tissue away. Wash your hands often. Stay home if you can.

**FDA Office of Women’s Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### FDA Center for Drug Evaluation and Research

Phone: 1-888-INFO-FDA (1-888-463-6332)

<http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/antivirals/influenza/default.htm>

### FDA Center for Biologics Evaluation Research

<http://www.fda.gov/cber/flu/flu.htm>

# Heart Disease in Women

A lot of people think that women do not get heart disease. More women die from heart disease than from anything else. Any woman can get heart disease.

When you think about heart disease, you probably think about chest pain. Women might not have chest pain. If they do, they might call it an achy, tight or “heavy” feeling instead of pain. The pain might even be in the back between the shoulder blades, instead of the chest.

Women might think these signs are no big deal because they don’t “sound” like a heart attack. Don’t ignore these signs. Go to your doctor or clinic right away.

## What are the signs of heart disease in women?

The most important sign is feeling really tired—even after enough sleep. Other signs of heart disease in women are:

- Trouble breathing
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling sick to the stomach
- Feeling scared or nervous
- New or worse headaches
- An ache in the chest
- Feeling “heavy” or “tight” in the chest

- A burning feeling in the chest
- Pain in the back, between the shoulders
- Pain or tightness in the chest that spreads to the jaw, neck, shoulders, ear, or the inside of the arms
- Pain in the belly, above the belly button

**There is good news:** You can take steps to keep your heart healthy.

## Lower your risk of heart disease

- Find out if heart disease runs in your family.
- Visit your doctor or clinic often. Find out if you are at risk.
- Don’t smoke. Stay away from other people who are smoking.
- Get your blood pressure checked often. You might need medicine to keep it at the right level.
- Control your diabetes.
- Get your cholesterol checked often.
- Stay active. Walking every day can lower your chances of a heart attack.
- Eat right and keep a healthy weight.
- Eat less salt.
- If you take birth control pills, don’t smoke.



# Heart Disease in Women



- Hormones for menopause should not be used to prevent heart attacks.
- Being stressed, angry, or sad a lot may add to your risk of heart attack.
- If you've had a heart attack, talk to your doctor about medicine. Some medicines can help cut down the risk of having another heart attack.

## High blood pressure

- High blood pressure adds to the chance of having heart disease.
- High blood pressure is called the “silent killer.” Most people who have it do not feel sick and don't know that they have it.
- Have your blood pressure checked each time you go to the doctor or clinic.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

**National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Information Office**  
Phone: 301-496-5751  
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov>

**National High Blood Pressure Education Program**  
c/o National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center  
Phone: 301-592-8573

# Osteoporosis

## What is osteoporosis?

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes very weak bones that break easily. Women are five times more likely to get osteoporosis than men. There is no way to stop or cure it, but there are things you can do to slow it down.

## What causes osteoporosis?

- It can run in families.
- Not enough calcium and vitamin D in the diet.
- Not getting enough exercise.
- Women who've gone through menopause are more likely to have it.

## Who is at risk for osteoporosis?

Anyone can get osteoporosis, but some people have a higher chance than others:

- Women
- People with a thin, small frame
- Others in your family who have had a lot of broken bones or a stooped posture
- Women who went through menopause before age 45
- Have had an eating disorder
- People over age 50

- People who have used certain medicines for a long time, like:
  - Some hormones
  - Medicines for seizure
  - Some medicines for asthma, arthritis, or cancer

## How do I know if I have osteoporosis?

- There are tests that use either X-rays or sound waves to measure bone density.
- Ask your doctor about which test you might need.

## How can I lower my chances of getting osteoporosis?

- Get enough calcium. Women under 50 years old need at least 1,000 mg of calcium each day. Women over 50 need at least 1,200 mg of calcium.
- Get enough vitamin D. Women under 50 years old need at least 200 IU of vitamin D. Women over 50 need at least 400 IU of vitamin D.
- Get exercise everyday, like walking or biking.
- Don't smoke.
- If you drink alcohol, don't drink more than one glass per day.



# Osteoporosis

## Which foods have calcium?

- Low-fat dairy products like milk, cheese, and yogurt
- Green, leafy vegetables like kale and turnip greens
- Tofu
- Canned fish (eaten with bones)
- Orange juice, cereal, and other foods that have calcium added

## What else can I do?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about medicines you can take to build bones.
- You might also need calcium or vitamin D pills.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

**FDA Office of Women's Health**

<http://www.fda.gov/womens/healthinformation/osteoporosis.html>

# Stroke

A stroke happens when the brain does not get enough blood. This kills brain cells. Many adults die from strokes.

Strokes can change the way a person thinks, speaks, sees, and moves. After a stroke, it may be harder to care for yourself or to have a job.

The good news is many people who have had a stroke can get back some or all of their skills. Speech and physical therapy can help.

## There are two major causes of stroke:

- A blood clot from another part of the body blocks a blood vessel or artery in the brain.
- An artery bleeds in or around the brain.

## Who has strokes?

- Adults over the age of 40 are most likely to have strokes. Younger adults and kids can also have them.
- About the same number of men and women have strokes.

- People of all races are at risk for stroke. African Americans are almost twice as likely to die from a stroke as whites. African Americans often have more damage.
- People with heart disease may have a bigger risk of stroke. Certain kinds of heart disease can cause blood clots.

## How can you lower your risk of stroke?

- Control your blood pressure—Having high blood pressure adds to the chances of having a stroke. One out of three people with high blood pressure does not know it. Get your blood pressure checked often.
- Control your diabetes—Diabetes can damage the blood vessels in the brain and increase the chance of having a stroke. Follow your doctor's advice to control your diabetes.
- Stop smoking—Smoking can cause blood clots. It can also make blood pressure higher. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse about ways to quit.
- Exercise daily—Exercise makes the heart stronger and blood flow better. It can also help you control your weight. Being heavy increases the chance of diseases.



# Stroke

Don't ignore the signs of a stroke. Even if you feel better in a few minutes or hours, you may have had a "mini-stroke." Mini-strokes may put you at risk for a full-blown stroke later. Call 911 if you have any of these warning signs (or have someone else call right away):

- Your face feels numb.
- Your arm or leg gets weak or numb.
- You lose part or all of your sight in one or both eyes.
- You have a hard time talking and/or understanding other people.
- You get a very bad headache for no reason.
- You get dizzy or fall all of a sudden.

FDA has approved a few drugs to prevent and treat stroke. Ask your doctor for more information.

**FDA Office of Women's Health** <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### **National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke Information Office**

Phone: 301-496-5751  
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