

Tip sheet

Women's health

While New Zealand has often been a world leader in women's rights, there remains a disparity of treatment, access and outcomes when it comes to healthcare. This can mean that female health concerns are not always recognised or given the focus they require.

That's why it's important for women to always advocate for themselves, listen to their bodies and understand the best approaches towards maintaining an overall sense of wellbeing.

A note on terminology

This tip sheet uses the terms 'women' and 'female', and at times refers specifically to vaginal or uterine health; however, these tips should be seen to include all women and related genders.



Physical health

Regular exercise

Engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week. Include strength training exercises twice a week to build muscle mass and support bone health. This is particularly important for preventing osteoporosis, for which women are at higher risk – particularly when their oestrogen levels drop during perimenopause and menopause.

Balanced diet

Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins. Include foods rich in calcium and vitamin D, and high in protein, to support building and maintaining muscle mass and bone health. Menstruation can cause low iron levels, so consider iron supplements if you notice changes in your energy levels or at your doctor's suggestion.

Menstrual health

Track your menstrual cycle to understand your body's patterns and identify any irregularities. Use products that are comfortable and safe, such as organic tampons/pads or menstrual cups.

Reproductive health

Schedule regular gynaecological check-ups, including pap smears, mammograms and STI screening. Discuss birth control options and family planning with your healthcare provider.

Hydration

Drink plenty of water throughout the day, particularly if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, to maintain optimal hydration and support bodily functions.

Regular medical check-ups

Don't neglect regular health screenings, including blood pressure checks and annual weight and blood tests.

Mental health

Mindfulness and activity

Practise mindfulness or meditation techniques to reduce stress and improve mental clarity. It's also great to stay active by exercising regularly – such as yoga, dance, the gym or anything that gets you moving.

Social connections

Maintain strong relationships with family and friends. Join women's groups or clubs such as 'ante natal' or 'mum's groups' to build a supportive community.

Professional help

Seek counselling or therapy if you're dealing with persistent mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or postpartum depression. If you feel more comfortable speaking to a female practitioner, you can always request this before you begin (organisation availability depending).

Hobbies and interests

Engage in activities you enjoy to provide a mental break and boost your mood. In group or family settings, remember to speak up for what *you* want to do as well.

Hormonal balance

Be aware of how hormonal changes throughout life – especially during menstruation, pregnancy and perimenopause/menopause – can affect your mood and mental health. Seek medical advice if you don't feel well or have experienced noticeable changes in your body and wellbeing.

Overall wellbeing

Self-care

NZ research shows most people that provide unpaid care for loved ones are women, so please make sure you make time for some regular self-care that makes you feel relaxed and happy. This could include catch ups with girlfriends without the kids, skincare routines, baths, massage, a new hair cut or quiet reading time.

Balanced lifestyle

Strive for a more balanced approach in work, leisure and family life to prevent burnout. Learn to say no more often to make time for yourself, and set boundaries, especially if you find yourself agreeing to everything to 'keep the peace' or not come across negatively. Assertiveness is necessary for good wellbeing!

Positive mindset

Women can often be critical of themselves in their self-talk. The next time you find yourself telling yourself off for something you didn't do well, imagine you are talking to your best friend - would you say those words to them? Work on small steps towards cultivating a positive outlook. You could start by having a daily gratitude practice and keep track of all the things you are grateful for in your life in a journal.

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