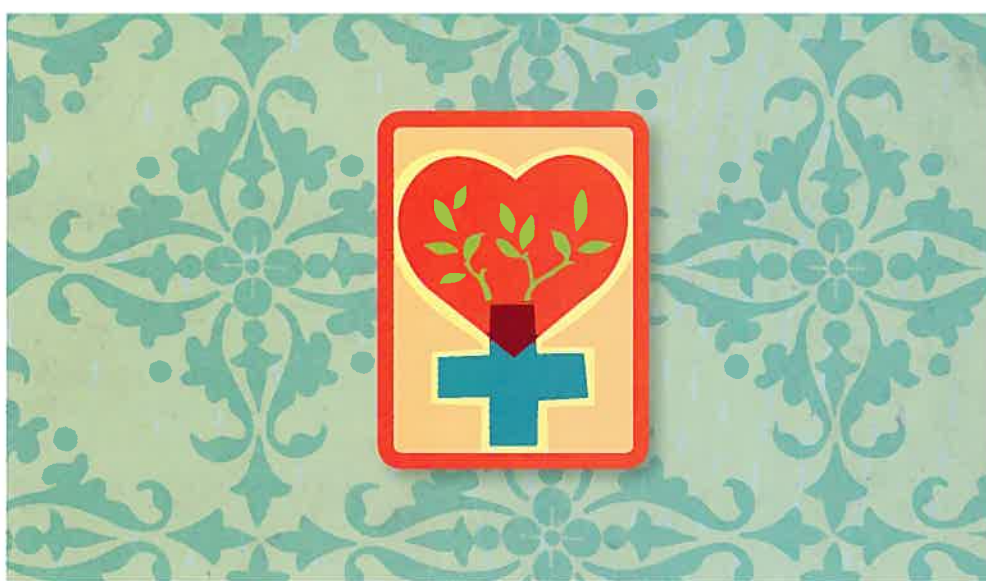




*“I can be changed
by what happens to
me, but I refuse
to be reduced by it.”*

—Maya Angelou,
poet



Women's Health

Nothing's more important than good health—and, as women, we have unique health issues at every stage of our lives. How can you make the health decisions that are right for you, and what kinds of support are out there to guide you? Do this badge to find out! Identify health topics facing women in your community and across the globe, explore those that matter most to you, and—in the last step—reach out and raise awareness to spread good health to the women in your world.

Steps

1. Investigate the tests that help women stay healthy
2. Find out how fads and beauty practices impact health
3. Focus on techniques to help you stay emotionally healthy
4. Take a closer look at a women's health issue
5. Get the word out on a women's health topic

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know how women can lead healthy lives.

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more!

Breast Cancer

Our founder, Juliette Gordon Low, died of breast cancer in 1927—and it remains a serious health issue today. As of 2011, about 1 in 8 women in the U.S. (12%) will develop breast cancer in her lifetime.

But the news isn't all bad!

Death rates have been decreasing since 1990. These decreases are thought to be the result of treatment advances, earlier detection through screening, and increased awareness.

In 2010, there were more than 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S.

TIP BEFORE TAKEOFF

In steps 1–4, you'll explore a variety of women's health topics. Throughout these steps, keep notes or a journal about what you find to use in step 5. There, you'll do an activity to raise awareness, and you'll want your research for reference!

STEP

I Investigate the tests that help women stay healthy

Screenings are medical tests that can spot problems before they turn into something serious. For instance, you might have your blood pressure checked to test for general health, a mammogram to test for breast cancer, or a Pap smear to test for STDs and cervical cancer. Become familiar with the tests that are available for women to help us manage our good health throughout our lives.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Find five steps to good health and prevention.** Who should get a flu shot? Why does a high cholesterol level put someone at risk for diabetes? How is skin cancer preventable? You might focus on one part of your body, such as your heart, skin, or bones, and recommend the proper nutrition, exercise, and screenings to take care of it.

OR

- Speak with a health professional.** Invite one to speak to your group, or go to a clinic or office to discuss tests and procedures that are important for women's health. Prepare some questions in advance.

OR

- Create a women's health poster or brochure.** In it, include a chart showing all the procedures and tests you will need from puberty through menopause. What is involved with each procedure? At what age should girls start having each of them? How often? What are the benefits of each test?

Laughter Is Great Medicine

Stressed-out people are at greater risk for heart disease. But an antidote to this just might be laughter. Medical experts say that laughter lowers your blood pressure and heart rate and, according to one doctor, may have a direct impact on improving the lining of your blood vessels.

"We know that exercising, not smoking, and eating foods low in saturated fat will reduce the risk of heart disease," says Michael Miller, director of the Center for Preventive Cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center. "Perhaps regular hearty laughter should be added to the list."

STEP

2 Find out how fads and beauty practices impact health

Fads generally fit into one of three categories. In the first category are things we do to our internal systems, including diets and eating fads. In the second category are things we do cosmetically, such as cosmetic surgery, tattoos, manicures, piercings, hair dye, wearing contacts, tanning, etc. The third category is habits: smoking, using drugs, drinking alcohol, wearing high heels, carrying heavy purses and backpacks, using portable listening devices, or not wearing protective sports equipment. Pick one issue in any of the three categories, then do one of the choices below.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

Interview a medical expert about a health or beauty fad. This might be a foot specialist who can share the problems brought on by wearing high heels or a skin doctor who can talk about infections from tattoos, piercings, or manicures and pedicures. Or the expert could be a hearing specialist with info on dangerous decibel levels. Find out how prevalent the problems are and what you can do to protect yourself.

OR

Follow a fad through time. Trace stories, evidence, and statistics about one fad over a period of at least 20 years. Try to speak to someone with personal experience. Was that person offered any warnings about possible complications or infections? What impact does the experience have on their life today? Take time to understand the long-term effects of the activity.

OR

Explore fads and beauty in other places. Other cultures have different views on beauty and health issues, such as weight, tattoos, piercings, and more. Gather images of women from other places—from international magazines, online, or in books—and make a beauty collage to compare the different outward expressions of beauty. How have those images of beauty impacted the culture where you live? What do you find beautiful? What makes the women in your life beautiful? You could include images from your own life as well.



Global Beauty Rituals

In some parts of Africa, it is traditional for women to carve permanent scars in geometric patterns on their bodies.

Women in Ethiopia's Mursi tribe wear large disks or plates inserted in their lower lips.

Thailand's Kayan tribe women are known for their "giraffe necks," achieved by wearing heavy permanent rings coiled around their necks.

The Maori people of New Zealand tattoo their lips and chins blue.



Proven Ways to Boost Your Mood

Depression is a serious medical condition, and it affects almost half of the women worldwide. If you feel depressed, the most important thing you can do is speak out and seek help. There are many treatments—and support networks—available.

And more positive news? There are many things within our control that can help our moods. Taking care of our physical bodies is one of the best management strategies: exercising; eating a healthy, balanced diet; getting enough sleep; and avoiding alcohol and drugs.

On the emotional side, de-stressing; expressing feelings—to friends, a counselor, or through art; maintaining supportive friendships; and taking time to relax can all boost our moods.

STEP

3 Focus on techniques to help you stay emotionally healthy

How you feel mentally impacts how you feel physically. Emotional conditions, such as stress and anxiety, can lead to alcohol or drug abuse, dangerous eating habits, and erratic sleep cycles, all of which can lead to physical problems. Paying attention to your emotional health is as important as overseeing your physical health, and this will be true throughout your lifetime.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Get to know your moods.** For two weeks, record your mood levels three times a day. At the end of each day, read them over, and then make notes: What do you think triggered each strong emotion? Did you get enough sleep? Did you exercise? Where are you in your menstrual cycle? See if you find any specific pattern to your moods. Then find three recommendations from a reliable health source on healthy ways to lift your mood. (You might try the Truth Seeker badge to help you determine the reliability of information!)

OR

- Explore healthy relationships.** All our relationships affect our health—those with friends, family, romantic partners, mentors, peers at large. Knowing the research can provide helpful ideas and tips for our own lives. Find three studies that offer some insight into relationships. For instance, some studies have found that close friendships can lengthen our life spans, that abusive relationships erode our health, and that a good marriage makes us happier. Other ideas you might look into include:

- What are the differences between how men and women communicate?
- Is there such a thing as a healthy breakup?
- How can we choose our friends and relationships to increase our happiness?
- How does family life fit into mental health?

OR

- Explore a psychological topic.** Interview a medical expert or read three or more articles about a topic you're interested in: perhaps depression, teen suicide, eating disorders, anxiety, or schizophrenia. Find out the causes, how widespread the issue is, and what treatments exist. Do more women than men suffer from it? If so, why might this be—and does the issue have a greater impact on younger or older women? Are there prevention measures available?

STEP

4 Take a closer look at a women's health issue

Choose a health issue that resonates with you, and explore its impact on girls and women. Perhaps it's something that has affected someone in your own family or another woman close to you. Perhaps it's something you discovered in one of the previous steps and want to look at through a different lens. (The boxes on pages 6 and 7 also have some ideas.) In this step, check into causes, consequences, and possible preventative measures and treatments.

CHOICES - DO ONE:

Take a global look at the issue. In what country/region is the health issue most commonly found? Is it avoidable? How? What health support do women in that area have access to? What can be done to help?

OR

Take a local look at the issue. Find out the statistics for the issue in your area. Talk to a local health care professional to explore the impact on your community. Are there any protective measures or awareness campaigns in place?

OR

Take a close-up look at the issue. Interview a medical expert or someone with firsthand experience. It might be a cancer survivor, a woman who has been treated for severe PMS, or a cardiologist who treats women. If appropriate, ask about diagnosis and treatments: What were the symptoms? What tests were taken? How was the patient treated? Can this issue be prevented?

Cervical Cancer Vaccine

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infections account for about half of sexually transmitted infections diagnosed among 15-to-24-year-old girls each year. HPV is extremely common, often has no visible symptoms, and is generally harmless. However, certain types, if left undetected and untreated, can lead to cervical cancer. Two HPV vaccines are currently available for girls and women 9 to 26, and both prevent the types of infections most likely to lead to cervical cancer.

Careers to Explore

- Nutritionist
- Dietician
- Ob-Gyn
- Nurse midwife
- Policy maker
- Legislator
- Lobbyist
- Health and human services employee

- Biologist
- Biochemist
- Computer specialist
- Epidemiologist
- Public health official
- Health care practitioner
- Sonographer
- Medical technician
- Women's health writer

- Women's health educator
- Women's reproductive health scientist
- Psychotherapist
- Health clinic coordinator
- Clinical social worker

STEP 5

Get the word out on a women's health topic

Focus on one area you learned about, and inform people in your community and the women in your life. Get creative! Use one of these choices to help you frame your message.

CHOICES – DO ONE:

- Design a public service announcement or presentation.** Use your audio/visual skills to create a video, presentation, or Web slide show about your topic. Post it online or e-mail it to friends, or present it to one of your classes or at a place of worship, a library, or a community center. You might tie your topic into an awareness event, such as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Prematurity Awareness Month, or World AIDS Day.

OR

- Hold a women's health forum.** Invite a panel of professionals in health and wellness to present facts and answer questions about the topic you chose. Use what you've learned to assemble the appropriate panel and help make the information the most relevant it can be for your audience—whether it's your Girl Scout group, other female friends and peers, or a group of women in your community.

OR

- Design a prevention program!** Focus on one women's health issue and come up with a program that includes exercise, diet, and other prevention tips. Share it as a brochure, website, exhibit/poster display, or slide presentation.

More to Explore

Raise your heartbeat—and awareness. Walk, run, or bike in an event that raises awareness about your women's health issue. Many communities host these kinds of events. Get fellow Girl Scouts involved in exercise, spreading awareness, and honoring women who help make a difference in our collective health.



Eating disorders

Women are more likely than men to suffer from an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, or binge eating.

Autoimmune diseases

One of the top 10 causes of death in women is autoimmune disease, including diabetes, lupus, multiple sclerosis, and hepatitis.

Alcohol, smoking, and drug abuse

Drinking, smoking, and drug use can affect a teen's overall health, physical growth, emotional development, and school performance. And lung cancer, often from smoking, kills more women in the U.S. than either skin or breast cancer.

Hearing loss

One in six teenagers are at risk for hearing loss. Boys are generally impacted more than girls, but studies have shown that girls are losing their hearing almost to the same degree as boys. The change may be due to increased use of portable music players.

SOME WOMEN'S HEALTH ISSUES

Heart disease

According to the World Heart Federation, heart disease (cardiovascular disease) is the number-one cause of death for women worldwide. Check out Go Red for Women, the World Heart Federation's campaign to reduce cardiovascular disease in women by building global awareness and commitment.

Sexually transmitted diseases

As soon as women become sexually active, they are at risk for certain diseases and infections.

Depression

Teenage girls are twice as likely as boys to suffer from depression. In severe cases, this can lead to suicide.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)

Almost 90 percent of women will deal with premenstrual syndrome during their reproductive years. PMS can cause a wide range of physical and emotional disruptions.

Skin cancer

Skin cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer among U.S. women.

Reproductive health

In the United States and Europe, it's fairly rare for a woman to die during childbirth. But in some countries—such as Botswana, Afghanistan, and Swaziland—more women than ever are suffering pregnancy-related deaths, most of which are preventable through better medical care.

Teen suicide

Suicide is the number-three cause of death in young adults age 15 to 24. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK) is a 24-hour counseling service for people who are suicidal or who fear that a family member or friend is thinking about committing suicide.

AIDS

Women make up more than half of the people with HIV/AIDS worldwide. Most of these women live in developing countries where education and treatment are difficult, if not impossible, to get. The myths surrounding the disease can make women with HIV/AIDS even more stigmatized.

Breast cancer

Death rates from breast cancer are on the decline. Why? Because of advanced screening, improved treatments, and increased awareness.

Obesity

More than one in 10 adults worldwide are obese, and women are more likely to be obese than men.

Bone health

Bones are living tissue, and constantly changing. Girls reach peak bone density by age 20, and after menopause, most women go through rapid bone loss, which can contribute to fractures.