

# american baby

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MOM TO MOM. WOMAN TO WOMAN.™

## Relax, Mom

**10** THINGS  
YOU'RE  
DOING RIGHT

**COOL NEW**  
High Chairs,  
Bibs, Sippies,  
And Dishes

SURPRISING  
WAYS TO  
AFFORD YOUR  
FIRST HOME

**TODDLERS  
BEHAVING  
BADLY**  
How to Teach  
Them to Be Good

AP

## WHEN WILL SHE WALK?

LOOK FOR THE CLUES  
THAT MEAN SHE'S READY

# BE HEALTHY... in your 20s, 30s, and 40s

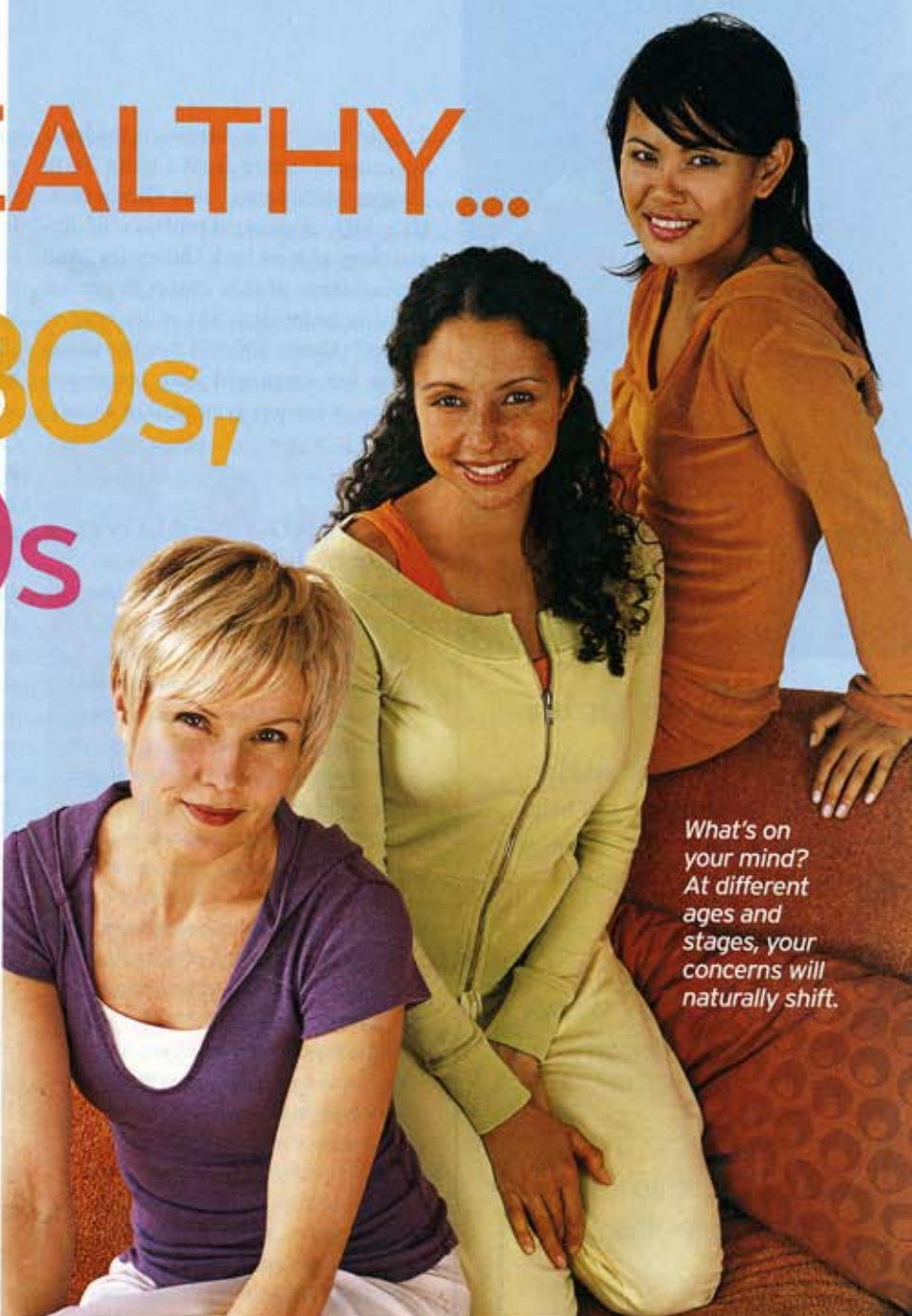
By Shaun Dreisbach

**Quick,** make a mental list of your three biggest health worries. Odds are they're very different from those of your little sister or older aunt. That's because, depending on where you are in life—expecting a baby (will I ever lose the weight?), entrenched in your career (stress!), or entering perimenopause (what's with the mood swings?)—your concerns understandably shift. “A 20-year-old isn't going to be thinking about breast cancer and heart disease the way a 40-something woman is. She's going to be more focused on, say, her sexual health,” explains JoAnn E. Manson, MD, chief of the division of preventive medicine at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital and a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. And rightly so, since your actual risk for certain problems—from skin cancer to depression to hypertension—also changes with age. Here, a guide to the key issues you should really home in on now—and expert advice for safeguarding your health through the years.

## IN YOUR 20s...

### TOP HEALTH CONCERNS

**1. Sexually transmitted diseases** A whopping 19 million new STD infections occur each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—and nearly half of them are in those age 24 and under. “STDs like herpes and human papillomavirus (HPV) are rampant these days,” says Steven R. Goldstein, MD, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at New York University Medical Center. You may be in a monogamous relationship, but that doesn't make you immune. “Some STDs, such as chlamydia and HPV, are asymptomatic, which means you may have one and not know it,” adds Dr. Goldstein. “There are many women who show up in my office with first-time evidence of HPV—and they've been married for years. They may have gotten it well before they even met their husband, and it's just now starting to cause problems.” Left undiagnosed and untreated, chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease (a serious infection of the upper genital tract) and infertility. Certain strains of HPV can cause cervical cancer, although the virus often clears up on its own without incident.



*What's on your mind? At different ages and stages, your concerns will naturally shift.*

**2. Skin cancer** “Melanoma is the leading cause of cancer death among 25- to 29-year-old women,” says Elizabeth K. Hale, MD, an assistant professor of dermatology at New York University. “And the incidence of skin cancer in general is rising faster than any other type of cancer.” About 900,000 twenty-somethings are diagnosed with melanoma (the most serious type of skin cancer)

## 20s YOUR STAY-HEALTHY CHECKLIST

■ **Get 1,000 milligrams of calcium and 200 to 400 IU of vitamin D daily to keep your bones healthy.**

It's best to get your calcium from the foods you eat (three servings of low-fat dairy products like milk, cheese, or yogurt will do it). But since the majority of young women aren't getting enough through diet alone, Dr. Cosman recommends taking a supplement that contains both calcium and vitamin D.

■ **Do regular bone-boosting exercise.** “Whatever workout you like to do, be sure it includes at least ten minutes of skipping rope or jumping jacks,” says Dr. Cosman. “High-impact activities like these have been shown to stress your body in such a way that they spur bone growth.” Another good choice: running (don't worry, in your 20s, your body can take the pounding). If you're pregnant, check with your doctor first, but you likely can (and should!) work out. In fact, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that healthy expectant moms exercise moderately for at least 30 minutes on most, if not all, days of the week. If jogging is too much on your joints, give strength training a try.

■ **Be smart about sun exposure.** Avoid going out during peak hours (between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.), and always wear a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Other must-haves: sunglasses and a cute, floppy hat that shades your eyes and head.

each year, in part, she says, because young women simply don't safeguard themselves as well as their older counterparts do. There's a lot of sun worshipping going on. “And unlike other skin cancers, melanoma tends to occur in people who go on vacation and fry themselves for a week—not in those who have had decades of chronic, low-level sun exposure,” explains Dr. Hale. “Tanning salons are also still popular among this age group, despite their well-known risks. I consider them to be as carcinogenic as smoking.” Plus, many women believe that by the time they're in their 20s, the harm has already been done. “But only 75 percent of sun damage occurs by age 18, which means there's still 25 percent that's left under your control,” says Dr. Hale. Any new moles—or changes you notice in the size or appearance of existing ones—should be checked out by a dermatologist.

**3. Bone health** Here's a surprising fact: “A woman's peak bone mass is reached by the time she's in her very early 20s,” says Felicia Cosman, MD, clinical director of the National Osteoporosis Foundation. “We used to believe it was much later—in your mid 30s—but the recent evidence suggests it occurs much younger.” Maintaining that peak level is crucial, she says, because the more bone mass you have going into the next several decades,

## TESTS TO GET IN YOUR 20s

- An annual physical, including a blood pressure check and baseline cholesterol screening (you'll get one every five years thereafter, if it's normal).
- A yearly Pap smear, which will help detect cervical abnormalities, including those linked to the HPV virus. Some ob-gyns also recommend getting a full battery of STD tests, particularly if you've had multiple sex partners.
- An annual skin check from your dermatologist—more often, says Dr. Hale, if you have a family or personal history of skin cancer, if you notice any skin changes, or if you have a lot of moles.

when it naturally and rapidly declines, the lower your risk for osteoporosis will be.

## IN YOUR 30s...

### TOP HEALTH CONCERNS

**1. Depression and stress** According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the median age of onset of depression is 32—and it's twice as prevalent in women as in men. The pressure-cooker lifestyle many 30-somethings lead is a major contributor, says Dr. Manson. After all, you're probably married and have a kid or two, your career is in full swing (read: long hours and lots of anxiety), and you've got a house and laundry and errands to run, which all adds up to a million obligations, seemingly no time in which to accomplish them, and through-the-roof stress.

**2. Premenstrual syndrome** "This decade is a peak time for PMS," says Christiane Northrup, MD, an ob-gyn and author of *Mother-Daughter Wisdom: Creating a Legacy of Physical and Emotional Health* (Bantam, 2005). "In your 20s, your body is more resilient, so you have an easier time clearing excess alcohol and caffeine from your system and getting by on too little sleep—all things that are known to exacerbate PMS. But that changes in your 30s, and your body starts to say, 'Hey, keep it up and you're going to hear from me!'" Result: symptoms such as breast

tenderness, fatigue, bloating, and irritability become worse than you remember them being in the past. Crazy work and family obligations may also mean you're less active, which can worsen PMS as well.

**3. Overweight and obesity** Maintaining a healthy weight is crucial at any age, but now is the time when, experts say, the scale needle really starts to climb (33 percent of women in their 30s are overweight, versus 23 percent of those in their 20s). Why? Research shows that most women never lose all of the baby weight they gained—keeping on up to 8 pounds, on average, two-and-a-half years after delivery. Plus, in your early 30s your metabolism (the rate at which your

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## TESTS TO GET IN YOUR 30s

- A yearly physical, including a blood pressure check and cholesterol screening. Also, talk to your doctor about your stress levels or any feelings of depression you may have. (In this case, don't wait for your annual checkup to roll around.)
- A Pap smear (every one to three years) and an annual clinical breast exam. You should give yourself monthly breast self-exams (BSEs) as well. For a how-to, log on to [komen.org/bse](http://komen.org/bse). "Breast cancer isn't a major concern in your 30s, but you do want to become increasingly vigilant," says Dr. Manson.
- A yearly skin check from your dermatologist.

# 30s

## YOUR STAY-HEALTHY CHECKLIST

■ **Get plenty of sleep.** Yes, you know you need at least eight hours a night, but the number of Americans who regularly get that much has dropped dramatically: 26 percent today compared with 38 percent in 2001, according to a recent National Sleep Foundation poll. Sure, life happens. Work happens. Screaming babies happen—which is why most of us are clocking a mere 6.8 hours a night on weekdays. The hard truth is that we need more. “Sleep is crucial for women in their 30s,” says Dr. Northrup. “It will do more for your mental health and body weight than almost anything else.” If you’re a new mom, that may seem like a ridiculously unattainable goal. But if you can’t bag all those zzzs at once, try to take naps during the day or go to bed an hour or two earlier on the weekend.

■ **Relax!** Even on days when you’re truly too harried to take 30 minutes for yourself, you can reduce anxiety simply by breathing properly, says Dr. Northrup. “When you inhale and exhale deeply through your nose, it activates the vagus nerve, which extends from your abdomen up to your brain stem. It, in turn, triggers the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the rest and relaxation system of your body. Take three deep breaths through the nose, and you will have decreased your stress hormone levels.”

■ **Strength train.** In your 30s, your body begins to lose muscle and replace it with fat. Start lifting weights to reverse the process, and you’ll get a big metabolic boost. That’s because muscle burns *four times* as many calories as fat does. Twenty minutes of strength training, two or three times a week, is what most experts recommend. Aerobic exercise, of course, is also important for keeping your weight in check and stress and PMS at bay—but it doesn’t give you the same long-term fat-burning power.

body burns calories) begins to naturally slow—so even if you were one of those lucky gals who could eat whatever she wanted, not exercise, and still stay slim, you may suddenly find that’s no longer the case. Lack of shut-eye (due to stress and those 1,001 daily to-dos) can also cause you to gain weight. A University of Chicago study found that sleep deprivation alters levels of the hormones in the body that regulate hunger, causing an increase in appetite—particularly for calorie-dense, high-carb foods.

## IN YOUR 40s...

### TOP HEALTH CONCERNS

**1. Perimenopause** This refers to the 6 to 13 years leading up to menopause—and most women notice the symptoms in their early to mid 40s. “During that time, your metabolism slows even more, and levels of hormones like estrogen and progesterone begin to fluctuate,” says Dr. Goldstein. This can lead to subtle—or not so subtle—changes in your cycle (it may become much longer or shorter, or you may bleed more or less than before), as well as to symptoms like irritability, memory changes, and sleep problems, he explains. “All of this happens well before you get your first hot flash.”

**2. Heart disease** Your odds of getting this condition don’t peak for another decade or so, but now is the time to take preventive action. “Blood pressure tends to rise in your 40s,” says Nieca Goldberg, MD, chief of women’s cardiac care at Lenox Hill Hospital, in New York City, and author of *The Women’s Healthy Heart Program* (Ballantine Books, 2006). “In fact, more than half of

## TESTS TO GET IN YOUR 40s

- An annual physical, which tests blood pressure and cholesterol. Starting at age 45, you should also get a fasting blood glucose screening, which tests for diabetes.
- Annual mammograms; monthly BSEs.
- A yearly Pap smear.
- An annual skin check.
- A thyroid function test.

## 40s YOUR STAY-HEALTHY CHECKLIST

- **Curb your refined-carb intake.** A diet loaded with white bread and rice, crackers, sugary snacks, and other processed, packaged items increases glycemic stress in the body by causing blood sugar levels to spike and plummet repeatedly, says Dr. Northrup. This can wear on your system over time, impairing your ability to effectively process these foods and setting the stage for heart disease, diabetes, and cancer—not to mention weight gain.
- **Drink less, move more.** Research shows that having more than one alcoholic drink a day ups your breast cancer risk. Exercise, on the other hand, lowers your odds of getting the disease. One study from the Women's Health Initiative, a landmark research project, found that walking briskly as little as 1.25 to 2.5 hours a week reduces a woman's risk of breast cancer by as much as 18 percent.
- **Watch your waistline, literally.** "Gaining weight, particularly around your middle, is a marker for type 2 diabetes and heart disease," says Dr. Goldberg. She recommends taking a waist-to-hip ratio: measure your waist just above your belly button and your hips at their widest part, then divide your waist measurement by your hip measurement. If the number is above 0.8, you're at risk, says Dr. Goldberg. Take steps now to slim down.

women over age 45 have high blood pressure, which increases your cardiovascular disease risk." Cholesterol levels can also begin to climb. Why? "Estrogen helps keep your 'bad' LDL cholesterol down and maintains the flexibility of your blood vessels so they're less susceptible to cholesterol buildup and high blood pressure," Dr. Goldberg explains. "As your estrogen levels naturally decline, your cholesterol tends to go up and you become more prone to hypertension."

**3. Type 2 diabetes** Along with heart disease, your risk for this health problem increases now as well. According to the CDC, 1.7 percent of Americans age 20 to 39 have type 2 diabetes. Between the age of 40 and 59, that number shoots up to 6.6 percent. Often called "adult onset" diabetes, it can result from being overweight, having poor diet and exercise habits, or having high blood pressure and cholesterol. You're also more prone to it if you had gestational diabetes.

**4. Breast cancer** Women in their 40s account for about 18 percent of all breast cancer diagnoses; 77 percent, by comparison, occur in those over 50. So while your risk isn't enormous, it's there, says Dr. Manson—particularly if you have a family history of the disease, are overweight, have a poor diet, or are sedentary.

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