

# Living WELL

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## A Woman's Guide

## to Good Health

When it comes to health, many concerns affect women differently than men and require special screening and treatment methods. This issue of *Living Well* is designed to focus on the unique health needs of women. You will find useful information about a variety of health-related topics, from preventive screenings you should receive and treatment options for certain conditions to ways you can keep your feet looking and feeling their best, especially as summer approaches.

Whatever your stage of life, it is never too late to take control of your health. Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery is proud to be your partner for good health, and we look forward to meeting your future healthcare needs.



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# Live Worry-Free



Because of factors such as pregnancy, childbirth, menopause and the general structure of the female urinary tract, millions of women in the United States suffer from urinary incontinence (UI). Because the condition varies in severity from slight disturbances to total debilitation and severe emotional distress, it's important to know you have treatment options.

**t**he two most common types of UI are stress incontinence and urge incontinence. Women who suffer from urge incontinence often feel a sudden, frequent need to urinate caused by involuntary bladder contractions or spasms. Stress incontinence is characterized by accidental leakage when patients cough, laugh, sneeze, jump or run.

A number of medications and behavioral therapies can alleviate the symptoms of UI, but for women who do not respond well to these treatment methods, surgical options are available. The most common procedure is the insertion of a sling, during which a surgeon places a piece of mesh under the urethra to help support the bladder and prevent leakage. It's a simple, outpatient procedure that allows patients to return to activity quickly.

"There are highly successful treatment options available for all types of urinary dysfunction," says Meredith Lightfoot, M.D., urologist on the medical staff at Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery (THCDS). "UI is not an inevitable consequence of aging or childbirth, and a great majority of women with incontinence can be helped by treatments that are readily available. Even if UI cannot be cured, it can be controlled."

**To find a urologist on the medical staff at THCDS, call (972) 403-2808 or visit [www.thcnds.com](http://www.thcnds.com).**

# A Silent Disease

**C**olorectal cancer – or cancer of the colon and rectum – is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in American women according to the American Cancer Society. Unfortunately, many people don't know they have the disease until it has reached advanced stages.

"In the early stages of colorectal cancer, women might experience no symptoms. That's why it's vital for women to receive colonoscopies every 10 years beginning at age 50 or even earlier if they have risk factors," says Jennifer Lowney, M.D., colorectal surgeon on the medical staff at Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery (THCDS). "If regular screenings are performed, colorectal cancer can be prevented and even cured in many cases."

Risk factors for colorectal cancer include family history of the disease or polyps (pre-cancerous growths of the colon that often can be removed during a colonoscopy), as well as a medical history of chronic inflammatory bowel disease, such as Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. If you have risk factors, talk with your physician about when you should begin screenings.

**Call (972) 403-2808 to find a colorectal surgeon on the medical staff at THCDS or visit [www.thcnds.com](http://www.thcnds.com).**

## Is It Time to Ditch the Heels?



**W**hile your new high-heel sandals may be fashionable, they also may be damaging your feet. Studies show wearing heels over a long period of time can lead to permanent problems and cause a great deal of pain.

A recent study of 3,300 men and women comparing the connection between foot pain and the type of shoes people wear found an increased risk of hind-foot pain among women who wore heels, pumps or other shoes that lacked total foot support. Nearly 64 percent of older women who reported hind-foot pain regularly wore heels, pumps or sandals at some point in their lives.

"High heels place excess pressure on the balls of the feet and this can result in shortening of the heel cord and Achilles tendonitis," says Leslie Campbell, D.P.M., podiatrist on staff at Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery (THCDS). "We offer a number of solutions to help patients suffering from foot pain."

**Call (972) 403-2808 or visit [www.thcnds.com](http://www.thcnds.com) to find a podiatrist on staff at THCDS.**

Whether you're a woman on the go, a business traveler, super mom or a combination, you've most likely experienced back pain. And it's no wonder—due to pregnancy, wearing high heels, picking up children and carrying big purses, at least 70 percent of women will experience back pain at some point during their lives.

# Take Control of Back Pain

**"p**eople spend more time at their physicians' offices for back pain than practically any other medical condition," says Jessica Shellock, M.D., orthopedic spine surgeon on staff at Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery (THCDS). "Natural stages of a woman's life—including pregnancy and menopause—place women at risk for back pain."

The extra weight that accompanies pregnancy places extra strain on a woman's back and neck, resulting in pain during and after pregnancy. When women reach menopause, their estrogen levels begin to deplete, often resulting in lower bone density. This puts women at higher risk for osteoporosis, which increases the likelihood of compression fractures that can cause significant back pain. The risk for other degenerative conditions, especially spinal stenosis, also increases as women age and may play a contributing role as well.

## HELP IS AVAILABLE

When patients experience back pain, physicians first encourage conservative treatment options, such as anti-inflammatory medications, physical therapy or strengthening exercises, and often weight loss and various types of spinal injections. However, if these methods are not effective, a number of surgical procedures—including many minimally invasive options—are available to provide relief from back pain resulting from degenerative and traumatic conditions.

"We offer a variety of surgical options to alleviate back pain for patients, including disc replacement, fusion procedures and fracture repair. We also participate in many clinical trials where patients have access to new options that haven't made it to the market yet," says Dr. Shellock. "Patients should discuss back pain with their physicians, who can help determine the cause of the pain and select the best treatment option based on their needs."

**To find a spine specialist on the medical staff at THCDS, call (902) 403-2808 or visit [www.thcds.com](http://www.thcds.com).**



## The Core of the Issue

One of the most important keys to alleviating back pain is exercise. Strengthening the core muscles can prevent many instances of back pain and injury.

"Exercising on a regular basis doesn't guarantee that a person has strong core muscles," explains Jessica Shellock, M.D., orthopedic spine surgeon on staff at Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery. "The core muscles consist of the abdomen, back, quadriceps [upper thighs] and buttocks. These muscles support the spine, whether you're sitting, walking or lifting. While running and other aerobic activities are good for your overall health and weight, they don't help strengthen your back."

Core-strengthening exercises tend to be easy on the body and are appropriate for women at all stages of life—whether they're pregnant, menopausal, elderly or young and fit. It's never too early or too late to start, and many exercises can be performed right in your own home. Some examples of core-strengthening activities include:

- crunches
- lunges
- Pilates
- squats
- Tai Chi
- yoga



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# Minimally Invasive =

## Less Time in the Hospital

Today, many patients choose minimally invasive surgical procedures versus conventional surgery due to many benefits, including less recovery time and postoperative scarring. At Texas Health Center for Diagnostics & Surgery (THCDS), physicians on the medical staff offer a wide range of minimally invasive procedures that help get you out of the hospital faster and back to the activities you enjoy.

Ask your physician if you are a candidate for minimally invasive surgery. For a list of procedures performed at THCDS, visit [www.thcnds.com](http://www.thcnds.com).