

# choices

HEALTH MATTERS FOR WOMEN

## **Are You Ready?**

Planning ahead for  
your future family

## **Eat Smart, Move More**

5 easy steps to a  
healthier body

## **QUIZ: Are you a good listener?**

Answer the  
questions and  
find out!

## **Positive Steps**

Making Choices,  
Making Changes



# choices

HEALTH MATTERS FOR WOMEN

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Relationships need to be cared for to stay healthy. Learn the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship and get tips on creating positive partnerships too.



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Look for the "partner power" boxes for tips on how friends and family can support each other in making tough life choices.

# Letter from the Editor



## Are you like everybody else?

The latest trends, the coolest places to hang out, the best new music ... it's easy to get caught up in what "everybody else" has or is doing. It feels good to be a part of the crowd. But life shouldn't be about keeping up with others or saying yes to something just to please a friend or partner. It's about choices and deciding for yourself what's best for you. And if you are pregnant, thinking about getting pregnant or having sex, you need to think about what is best for baby, too. The choices you make about your body will affect you and your child.



## How smart are you?

Inside, you'll find information about how to make smart decisions for a healthier you. It includes questions to help you think about your life and offers resources to help you make positive changes. Making healthy choices can improve the quality of your life in many ways, including how you physically look and feel and how you feel about yourself!

## It is all about YOU.

At the end of the day, everything you do is about making choices. Sometimes you make a great choice and things work out just the way you hoped. Other times, you need to change your focus, try again or make a different choice in order to get where you want to go. That's ok. Whether it's about food, stress, relationships, smoking, alcohol, or more, **choices** can help you make positive changes for life. And it's never too late. You can make the choice to change any time you want.

# Health Isn't Just About Your Body



## In a healthy relationship you ...

- Feel safe, respected and secure
- Are comfortable being yourself
- Listen to each other's feelings and support each other
- Enjoy time together and apart
- Respect sexual decisions together
- Trust and are honest with each other

## In an unhealthy relationship, one or both of you ...

- Feels scared and pressured by, or jealous and possessive of, the other person
- Makes all the decisions without listening to what the other one thinks, wants or needs
- Criticizes and makes the other person feel bad
- Keeps the other person from seeing other people
- Expects to know where the other one is and what she/he is doing at all times
- Forces the other person to have sex
- Hurts or threatens to hurt the other person, her/his family members, pets or favorite things



## quiz: I'm All Ears!

When friends talk to you about something that is important to them, do you:

Yes	No	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask them about their feelings and listen to their answers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Check in with them to make sure you truly understand?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Focus on them and their feelings without trying to tie the conversation back to you and your experiences?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes miss what they are saying because you are thinking about what you want to say next?

If you answered "yes" to all but the last question, you are a great listener. If not, think about how you can better focus your attention on others so they can be heard. As the saying goes, "To have a good friend, you have to be a good friend." Good friendships (and any other kind of healthy relationship) start when people hear each other and respect each other's feelings and needs. They can communicate openly and honestly.

# creating healthy relationships

Life is full of relationships with friends, co-workers, family and romances. In a healthy relationship, you feel comfortable, happy and respected. Sometimes, it can be just the opposite—you feel scared, sad or worried. In an unhealthy relationship, you may feel like you don't have control over choices about how you act or what you do.



*Am I the only one?*

**Sometimes I feel like I am the only one of my friends who doesn't party all the time. I really want to take care of myself but find it hard to do on my own. What can I do?**

If someone is trying to get you to use alcohol or drugs, smoke or something else that is bad for you, you need to think hard about your relationship. Research shows that people who have friends that make unhealthy choices are more likely to make those same bad choices. Perhaps it's time to move on.

It takes energy, but good friends are worth the effort. Remember that in a good relationship, both people feel good about themselves. If you believe in yourself and your right to be treated well, you're on the right track. The keys to a good relationship are respect and trust. And the best way to earn that trust is to communicate well. You need to be able to talk AND listen to each other.

## Ask Yourself:

Who do you turn to when you need to make a decision?

Is that person a good or bad influence?

Would that person support you in making good choices, like getting an HIV test?

**If you can't name two people who are positive influences in your life, look for new friends who will support you in making healthy choices.**



- Think about a friend or family member that you trust to help you make good choices.
- Take time to tell her how much you value her.
- Make a plan to do something together that you both enjoy.

# FOOD, MOOD, Cravings & You



## Don't skip out!

It's not just what you eat that matters. Skip a meal and your blood sugar may drop too much. You could wind up with a headache, feel dizzy or be moody. To avoid feeling bad, don't let too much time pass between meals or snacks.

## What triggers you to eat?

Do you go for the chips when you're stressed or ice cream when you feel blue? Your emotions can trigger you to seek "comfort" food, something that reminds you of a happy time or was given to you to feel better as a child.

Food triggers can be physical, too. Craving sweets or salty snacks before your period can be because of hormone changes. If you crave something unusual, like crushed ice, check with your doctor. You may need to add certain vitamins or minerals to your diet.

## EAT SMART, MOVE MORE

**Enjoy more fruits and vegetables.** Make fruits and vegetables more than half your plate at every meal and for every snack. Fresh, frozen, dried or canned all count so mix it up!

**Right-size your portions.** Eat smaller portions of food and drinks at a slower pace to fill you up, not out.

**Re-think your drink.** Try water with lemon or flavored, unsweetened drinks instead of sugary drinks.

**Prepare more meals at home.** Healthy home cooked meals can be quick, easy and inexpensive. Follow simple recipes to reduce preparation time.

**Choose to move more everyday.** Walk, dance, play, work in your yard ... 30 minutes of day of movement can help you stay in shape and feeling good. Can't find 30 minutes all at once? Break it up into three 10-minute activities instead.

## did you know ... ?

Caffeine can give you energy. But it can also make you cranky or nervous, or make it hard for you to fall asleep. Cut back on coffee, cola and chocolate ... and you cut back on problems.



# Are You READY?



## *Planning ahead for your future family*

Do you dream of a big family with lots of children? Is one or two enough? Maybe you don't see any children in your future. Do you have a plan? If you see yourself with any children in the years ahead, you need to make sure you are healthy before getting pregnant. Women with certain health conditions, including obesity, diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, and those who smoke, drink alcohol or use illegal drugs may be at higher risk for preterm birth, low birthweight babies and babies born with mental or physical problems.

Planning ahead is the key to helping you have a healthy pregnancy. Ask yourself and your doctor, do I need to:

- Get tested for any any infections or health conditions?
- Control any health issues I have?
- Stop or change any medicines I am taking?
- Change my diet or exercise routines?
- Share any important information in my family history?

You need to talk to your doctor and be truthful about how your behaviors can affect you, your baby and the rest of your life.



## **A VITAMIN** a Day...

All women should take a multivitamin with 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid every day before getting pregnant and throughout pregnancy. This can significantly lower your risk of having a baby born with certain birth defects.

## **timing** is everything

After your first baby is born, it is important to plan ahead for your next one. Consider spacing out your pregnancies. Most research suggests that waiting 2-3 years between children is ideal for mom and baby. Having babies too close together (less than 1 1/2 years) or too far apart (more than 5 years) can lead to complications for both baby and mom.

## **Not Ready Yet?**

That's ok. Having a child is a big decision and one you need to consider seriously. Whether you see yourself with one child, many, or none at all, you need to plan for your future. Half of all pregnancies in North Carolina are unplanned. If you get pregnant unexpectedly, it can lead to a lot of stress for you, your family and your child. If you have decided that now is NOT the time for you to have a baby, have you thought about how to prevent yourself from getting pregnant? There are many kinds of birth control. Talk to your healthcare provider to decide what is the best kind for you.

## **Take the First Step**

To learn more about family planning and birth control, talk to your healthcare provider. If you do not have one, contact your local health department or call Planned Parenthood at **1-800-230-PLAN (7526)** to find a clinic in your area.

# WHY WOMEN



## Have you heard these reasons?

**SEX is better.** Some women say drugs can increase pleasure “in bed.” The truth is alcohol and drugs can make you lose your ability to make good choices. You could end up with a stranger or with a nasty sexually transmitted infection from a one-night fling. You could pass out and become vulnerable to physical and sexual assault. You can even get pregnant when you didn’t plan on it.

**It helps me cope with stress.** Have you ever felt like your life is out of control? Some women turn to drugs and alcohol for a pick-me-up or to relax if they are stressed. You might feel better for a short time. But, keep it up and you could end up with hangovers, withdrawals and even worse problems, including addiction.

**I’m too FAT.** If you use drugs to lose weight, you may hurt yourself more than the extra pounds do. Drugs can make you physically sick. If you become dehydrated, you risk heart and liver damage.

Some women use alcohol and other drugs to escape. Getting high makes them feel better. It helps them forget about their problems. For others, it’s all about the thrill of doing something they shouldn’t or the feeling they get from the drug itself. Other women start out by trying a little for fun at parties or clubs because others are doing it, or they are curious. But they fall into the trap of thinking that being high is the only way to have a good time ... or their bodies crave more.

## Lower your alcohol intake and get:

- **Less bloating.** Alcohol causes bloating all over, sometimes making your face puffy. Not to mention, beer and wine are high in calories and can cause weight gain.
- **Shinier hair.** Too much alcohol can dry your hair, making it look dull. Drinking can also cause dandruff.
- **Clearer skin.** Drinking can make your acne worse. When you drink a lot of alcohol, your body does not process vitamins and calcium well. This can lead to dull skin and breakouts.
- **Moister lips.** Women who drink too much don’t get all of the vitamins and nutrients they need, and that can lead to dry, cracked lips.

## Alcohol and the Sexes

Alcohol affects women differently than men. How? Women break down alcohol slower. Why? Because women typically weigh less and have less water and more fat in their bodies than men, so more alcohol goes directly into the bloodstream. Alcohol gets to a woman’s brain faster and she feels the effects sooner. Binge drinking—too much alcohol in a short time—can cause you to pass out, vomit a lot, or can even kill you.

### did you know ... ?

**Cocaine** (including crack cocaine) is extremely addictive. It can cause panic attacks, paranoia, stroke and death. **Meth** also is very addictive. It causes rapid, irregular heart beat as well as extreme energy and alertness. Long-term use can lead to violent behavior, anxiety, confusion and sleeping problems. **Marijuana** may cause memory loss, increased heart rate, breathing problems and makes you less able to fight off germs. It has many of the same cancer-causing ingredients as cigarettes.

# use drugs and alcohol



## What are the chances?

There is no way to predict if you will have problems with alcohol. However, many women who drink too much:

- have suffered a trauma or sexual abuse.
- have trouble with close relationships.
- are depressed or drink alone.

Single women in their 20s or early 30s also are at higher risk. When friends or a partner are heavy drinkers, some women find it harder to stop. Drinking tends to get out of control for women whose friends also drink too much.

## Think before you drink and be sure you have a choice.

When you are under the influence, it can be harder to say “no.” You may be at greater risk for sexual assault. If you are sexually active and drinking, use reliable birth control, including a condom. If you ever think someone has forced you to have sex or do something you didn’t want to, get help and sort it out.

Take care of yourself so someone else can’t take advantage of you!

- If you choose to drink, limit yourself to no more than one drink a day.
- Be smart, buy your own drink and keep your eye on it. The only way to know for sure that nobody has put drugs or another type of alcohol in your drink is for you to watch your drink yourself.

## If you or a friend needs help ...

- If you don’t feel comfortable talking to your doctor about alcohol or drug use, find a safe place to discuss these issues.
- If someone you know has used alcohol or other drugs during pregnancy, encourage her to tell her doctor.
- If you used alcohol or drugs before you knew you were pregnant, you should also speak to a healthcare provider. If you stop using alcohol or drugs as soon as you find out you’re pregnant, there will be less risk to your baby.
- If you are worried about a friend, let her know. Pick a time to talk when she is not under the influence. Be specific about how she behaves when she’s using.

With help and support, many people will stop using and rebuild their lives.

## Where to Get Help

CARE-LINE:  
**1-800-662-7030**

Alcohol/Drug Council of North Carolina:  
**1-800-688-4243**

Treatment Facility Locator:  
**<http://dasis3.samhsa.gov>**

Alcoholics Anonymous:  
**[aanorthcarolina.org](http://aanorthcarolina.org)**

## did you know ... ?

Carbonated beverages can make a hangover worse.



- Make a deal with your friend for both of you to switch to water after the first drink.
- Agree to sip, not chug.

*Why chance it?* Alcohol causes more damage to a baby before it is born than any other substance, including marijuana, heroin and cocaine. While breastfeeding is best for your baby, if you use alcohol or other drugs, you share them with your baby through your breast milk.

# Stressed Out?

## Get the Stress Out Now ... Here's How

How do you react to stress? Does your heart race? Do you have muscle pain? Headaches? Trouble sleeping, an upset stomach or skin breakouts? That's normal. We can feel stressed when good and bad things happen to us.



Reducing stress in the long run means changing habits, attitudes and emotions. Here are some ways to make positive changes:

### Lifestyle Changes

- Get enough sleep
- Connect with friends and/or family
- Eat balanced meals that include fruits and vegetables, and cut down on caffeine and sugar
- Meditate, pray, dance or do yoga
- Go for a walk, run or bike ride

### Attitude and Emotional Changes

- Set priorities, know your limits, and say "no" to anything else
- Think positively and laugh at least once a day
- Know that you are important and make time for yourself every day
- Share your feelings with others
- Accept that you can't control every situation or other people



Try to lower your stress in a positive way. Take a warm bath, listen to music, watch a favorite movie, care for your pet—things that help you relax and regain control.

Sometimes people do things to feel better that are harmful. Overeating, smoking, drug and alcohol use can give temporary relief from a stressful time. But they can actually increase stress reactions in your body. They also hide the true causes of stress, making it harder to face problems and develop long-term solutions.

Think about starting habits that will help you and your body. For instance, exercising will not only make you healthier, but can decrease your stress, fight depression and anxiety, and help you sleep better.

## When is it time for more help?

Sometimes life may be too much to figure out on your own. It's okay to admit that you can't solve all your own problems all the time. If you or a friend have any of these signs, it might be time to seek help from a doctor, minister, counselor or other professional:

- Feel anxious, sad, depressed, hopeless or tearful most of the time
- Lack of interest in things you usually enjoy
- Trouble sleeping or wanting to sleep all the time
- Managing stress by smoking or drinking too much or using drugs
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Thoughts of running away, injuring yourself or others
- Excessive weight loss or gain from lack of appetite or overeating



# Love doesn't Hurt

Love doesn't hurt, or at least it shouldn't. And we're not talking about a broken heart. Domestic violence is a form of abuse that happens within the family or a couple. It comes in many forms. Not all leave you with physical marks. Besides physical violence, there is also emotional, verbal and sexual violence. No one deserves to be abused. And it is never your fault. Answer the questions on this page. Do you recognize these signs in your life?



## Stop the Cycle of Violence

Domestic violence affects the entire family. Children learn to solve problems the way the adults in their lives do. Domestic violence is a learned behavior. What are your children learning?



Friends help friends. Do you think your friend is being abused? Here's how you can help:

- Find out about services available in your community.
- Share what you know.
- Listen to her if she wants to talk.
- Help her with what she needs (transportation, child care, money).
- Call the police immediately (911) if you know abuse is occurring or your friend has been threatened!

**Leaving an abusive relationship can be difficult. Be there when she needs you.**

## Are You Being Abused?

<i>Does your partner ...</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Threaten to hurt you (or your children)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hit you, and then promise never to do it again?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Embarrass, criticize or insult you in public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not let you talk with your family or friends?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Push you, hit you, try to strangle you, kick you or slap you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make you have sex when you don't want to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you answer "yes" to one or more of these questions, you could be in an abusive relationship. And you're not alone. Almost one out of every three women is a victim of domestic violence in this country. This includes women of every race, religion, age and income level.

## there's a connection:

Studies show that physical and sexual abuse among young women is associated with increased substance abuse, unhealthy weight control, risky sexual behavior, pregnancy and suicide. Making the choice to reach out for support could help you avoid lots of other problems later.

**Learn about domestic violence.** A good first step:

Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline **1-800-799-SAFE** (7233). This is a free call, and the line is open 24 hours a day. To find help in your area, call the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence at **1-888-232-9124**.



# Smoking is more

## Are nic-fits real?

**Yes.** When a smoker doesn't have a cigarette for a while, the body sends out a message asking for it. Nicotine is as addictive as some street drugs. The good news is all smokers can kick the nic habit, no matter how long they've smoked.

*Women who smoke as few as three to five cigarettes a day double their risk of heart attack.*

## Health Matters

**Adult smokers, on average, die 13–14 years earlier than nonsmokers. That's like not being around to see your first grader graduate from high school.**

Smoking is a leading cause of heart disease, many types of cancers and breathing problems. Smoking also puts you at greater risk for:

- gum disease and tooth loss.
- cataracts, a leading cause of blindness.
- infections.
- wounds not healing after surgery.
- sexual and infertility problems.
- weaker bones after menopause.

Women who smoke and use certain birth control methods may be at a higher risk for serious health problems.



## For kids' sake!

Smoking during pregnancy can cause miscarriage or cause your baby to be premature or low birthweight. Your baby also has a 3–4 times greater risk of dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

## Set a good example.

*Quit smoking, especially before your child turns eight, and she will be less likely to start smoking as a teenager.*

## Secondhand smoke hurts everyone

Even if you don't smoke, breathing secondhand smoke can cause lung cancer, heart disease, allergies and trigger asthma. It also increases your baby's chances of dying from SIDS.

# than just a habit



## Try these tips for quitting gradually:

- Cut down on how many cigarettes you smoke
- Wait longer between cigarettes
- Make a quit plan and set a date to quit

**Think about when and what you are doing when you smoke. (Do you smoke after dinner?)**

**Think of something you could do instead. (Take a walk.)**

**Most smokers want to quit and wish they had never started smoking in the first place.**

**There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke.**

**There is no safe cigarette. Clove and low-tar cigarettes are harmful, too.**



**just Ask**

Many resources are available to help smokers quit. Talk to your healthcare provider about

ideas for quitting including using nicotine patches or gum or taking oral medications. Staff at your county health department can provide counseling and link you to services. You can also call the numbers below.

### **North Carolina Tobacco Use Quitline**

1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)

### **Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids**

1-202-296-5469



- Find a quit-smoking buddy.
- Ask your partner, friend or co-worker to support you.

## Stop smoking and doing drugs and get ...

- **Brighter skin.** Smoking and drugs age the skin, giving it a yellow or grey tone.
- **Fewer wrinkles.** Smoking causes wrinkles around the lips and the eyes.
- **A whiter smile.** Nicotine stains teeth yellow and can cause gum disease.
- **Fresher breath.**
- **A better sense of smell and taste.**

To find out how dependent you are on tobacco and for quitting tips, go to:  
[www.nhealthystart.org/smokingquiz.pdf](http://www.nhealthystart.org/smokingquiz.pdf)

# POSITIVE *steps*

Life is about the choices we make. From everyday decisions like what to wear and what to eat, to harder choices like giving up smoking or staying away from negative influences. Although it's not always easy to make changes, the choices we make affect the direction of our lives. Don't give up. Take a moment to think about where you are in your life and what choices you can make to improve it.

## 6 Steps to Making a Change:

1. Write down one thing you want to change.  
.....
2. Make a list of the benefits of this change.  
.....
3. Write down what gets in the way of making this change.  
.....
4. Make a plan of how you can overcome these barriers.  
.....
5. Find a friend, group or hotline to help support your change.  
.....
6. Don't give up. Even if you have a setback, remember that if you stick with it, you can succeed. And when you do, it will be worth it.



### Appreciate how far you have come ...

Today I am grateful for .....

.....

I am proud of myself for .....

.....

I appreciate my body because .....

.....

My best quality is .....

.....

### Then ask yourself, where you want to be ...

Am I living the life I want? .....

What can I do to improve my situation? .....

.....

What is getting in the way of my making these changes? .....

.....

Who can help me make these changes? .....

.....

What would my life be like if I make these changes? .....

.....



- Ask a friend to attend a support group meeting or help you through the tough times.

## You Deserve to Live Your Best Life!

### Did you know ... ?

In just 28 days, a new behavior can become a regular part of your life.

# She May Be Your *Sister*, Your *Friend*, Your **NEIGHBOR**

For most people, there will be a time when a friend or family member needs you. Here are some ways to help someone you care about get away from a harmful habit, an unhealthy relationship or a challenging situation.



## Be Caring

- Learn about her problem. The more you know, the better you can help.
- Give praise and rewards. "You're the best." It's short, but means a lot.
- Believe that she can change no matter how many tries it takes.
- Remember unhealthy habits or relationships can be hard to change.
- Be patient. Changes like quitting smoking can cause her to feel different or be down for awhile. Help your friend keep her long-term goal in mind.
- Ask how things are going and listen to what she says.
- Be understanding. Your friend may be sad, like she has lost a good friend.
- Spend time together. Being active can make her feel less stressed.
- Don't ignore it if she slips up. Talk about it and support her to keep trying.
- Find other help for your friend: self-help books, toll-free hotlines, health professionals or treatment centers.
- Find someone to talk to so you don't get burned out helping your friend.

When it comes to caring about someone who is struggling with addiction, remember the seven **Cs**:

- I didn't **Cause** it
- I can't **Cure** it
- I can't **Control** it
- I can take better **Care** of myself by:
  - **Communicating** my feelings
  - Making healthy **Choices**
  - **Celebrating** myself

# You are in charge ...



## ... of your Life and your choices.

 clip and save

### if you or a friend needs help, call the resources below:

<b>Planned Parenthood</b>	<a href="http://www.plannedparenthood.org">www.plannedparenthood.org</a>	1-800-230-PLAN (7526)
<b>Alcohol/Drug Council of North Carolina</b>	<a href="http://www.alcoholdrughelp.org">www.alcoholdrughelp.org</a>	1-800-688-4232
<b>Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator</b>	<a href="http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/">http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/</a>	(web only)
<b>Alcoholics Anonymous</b>	<a href="http://www.aanorthcarolina.org">www.aanorthcarolina.org</a>	phone numbers on website
<b>National Domestic Violence Hotline</b>	<a href="http://www.thehotline.org">www.thehotline.org</a>	1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
<b>NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence</b>	<a href="http://nccadv.org">http://nccadv.org</a>	1-888-232-9124
<b>North Carolina Tobacco Use Quitline</b>	<a href="http://www.quitlinenc.com">www.quitlinenc.com</a>	1-800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669)
<b>Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids</b>	<a href="http://www.tobaccofreekids.org">www.tobaccofreekids.org</a>	1-202-296-5469
<b>CARE-LINE</b>	<a href="http://www.nccarelink.gov">www.nccarelink.gov</a>	1-800-662-7030



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