

Healthy Living *for Young Adults*

SPECIAL FOCUS ON HPV

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR TOMORROWS!

- ✓ Stay healthy
- ✓ Explore your job path
- ✓ Nurture your relationships
- ✓ Curb stress and find calm
- ✓ Set yourself up for financial stability

HPV: Know the facts, protect yourself! p. 8

"I'm laying the groundwork for a fulfilling future!"

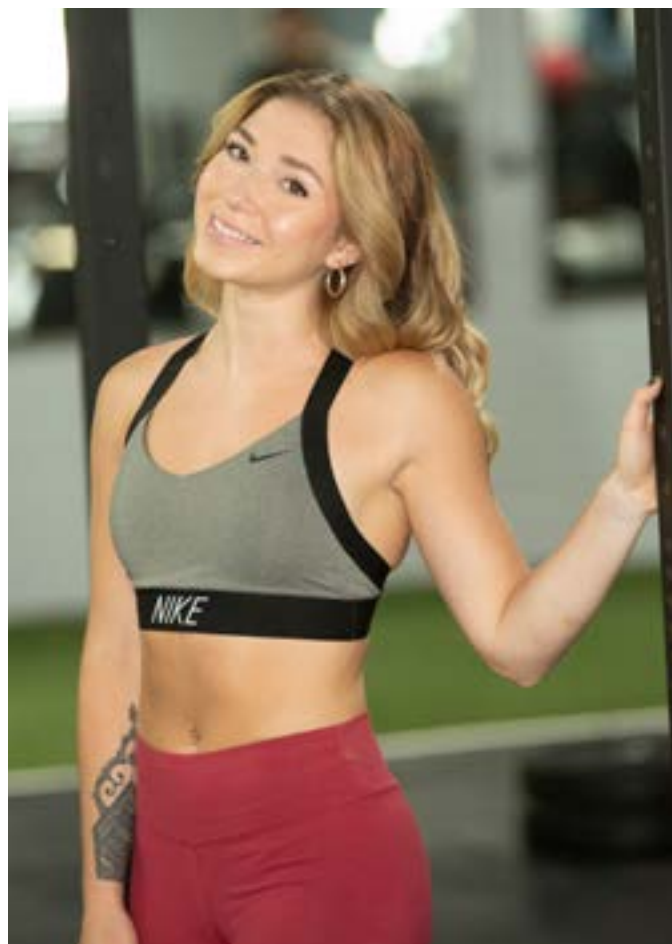
At 22, Gabriela is making career, study and health decisions that feel just right

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GUIDE TO Healthy Living for Young Adults

SPECIAL FOCUS ON HPV



12 “For me, taking care of my body is as important as my mental health right now—and that means protecting myself with things like the HPV vaccine,” says Gabriela Martes-Urbe.

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Define *your* decade!

Heading into your 20s is exciting, challenging and a little overwhelming: School, job, health, fitness, love, friends, finance—the path ahead is yours to forge. Read on for the guidance, support and strategies that can ease your journey toward joyful independence.

At 26, realtor Jennifer Parisi is wrapping up studies for her appraisal license, fielding questions on mortgages and liens, and saving money to put down on a place of her own. (She currently lives with Mom.) “I picked a field I’m passionate about,” says the Eatontown, NJ, resident, who admits that building her credibility as a real-estate professional hasn’t been easy. “It’s especially challenging as a young person. Clients think I won’t have the necessary background, but once I start talking to someone about real estate, the response is ‘Wow! You really know a lot about the industry!’”

As driven as she is on her job path, Jennifer gives equally careful thought to other areas of her life. “The decisions I make now will impact my future, and I look at my 20s as a crucial time to set up my life for success.” One key focus is fitness and nutrition. “I ride my bike every day for exercise and peace of mind,” says Jennifer, who has a degree in business marketing. “I also do yoga three times a week.” A pescatarian, she rounds out her

meals with veggies, beans, peanut products and “a lot of avocado.”

Her sexual and reproductive health is also top of mind: “I see my gynecologist every year, and we have a great bond,” she says. “I feel very comfortable talking with her about anything. I’ve asked her about making sure a partner is free of STIs before getting intimate, like how to ask and what to look for, and if birth control will make it difficult for me to have kids when I’m ready.” That openness was key three years ago, when one of Jennifer’s best friends was diagnosed with HPV (human papillomavirus), the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the U.S. (see p. 8 for more info). “I had no idea what it was! I was completely unaware of HPV and its serious consequences, such as cervical cancer, and how easy it is to get it. I was shocked to learn that not even condoms can protect against it, since it is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact.”

Luckily, Jennifer spoke to her gyno about it and learned there’s a vaccine that offers protection from the most serious strains of

HPV, which are directly linked to cervical and other HPV-related cancers, such as those of the vagina, vulva, anus and throat. “I didn’t think twice,” says Jennifer, who has been in a serious relationship since January. “I asked for the vaccine, and it’s given me immense peace of mind.”

If you’re a young adult, like Jennifer, looking to set the stage for a successful and healthy future, keep reading this guide. You’ll get important health screening information, real-life tips from other young women and goal-setting inspiration.



Remember that along the way, you can turn to healthcare professionals—your primary care provider, your gynecologist, registered dietitians, psychologists, and others—for guidance and support. As you mature—whether you’re about to start or return to college (whatever that might mean for you during COVID), embark on your work life or maybe set out on your own (with roommates, a partner or solo)—you now have more decision-making power than ever. Use it to take charge and define your decade for maximum fulfillment! 📌

Did you know?

The 20-something brain is flexible, adaptable and able to cope with change because the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain associated with decision-making, is still developing. So use this time for exploration and experimentation.

Put together your team!

Having a group of medical experts you trust and feel comfortable opening up to is an invaluable asset during young adulthood and beyond. Here are some of the healthcare providers you may want on your side:

- **Primary care provider:** This may be an internist, family doctor, pediatrician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant, who will track your overall health and treat common illnesses. They can also refer you to specialists.
- **Gynecologist:** This MD specializes in female reproductive health. They can advise you on birth control, recommend screenings, help with menstrual issues and much more.
- **Dermatologist:** This MD can do full body checks and treat conditions such as acne, psoriasis, rosacea and more.
- **Psychologist, therapist or social worker:** These mental health experts can help you cope with life’s challenges, provide counseling, and diagnose behavioral disorders and mental illnesses.
- **Registered dietitian:** This nutrition and food expert can help you design a personalized eating program.

Preventive care: Make it a priority!

Going to the doctor, getting tests, getting shots—it can seem like a massive waste of time and not really necessary when you're young. But preventive care and routine screenings not only establish a baseline against which future tests can be measured, but they can also detect silent conditions and prevent you from getting diseases such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Read on for the care and tests you shouldn't skip!

Heart health

Blood pressure: This test measures the force with which blood pushes against your artery walls as it circulates. The first number measures your systolic blood pressure, the pressure on your vessels during a heartbeat; the second measures your diastolic blood pressure, or the pressure between beats.

- **Why it's important:** High blood pressure has no symptoms, so the only way to know is to get it measured. If your blood pressure is high (greater than 140/90), your healthcare provider may recommend more frequent testing.
- **How often:** Starting at age 21, then once every one to two years. If the top number is between 120 and 129 and the bottom number is between 80 and 89, you should have it checked every year.

Cholesterol: This blood test measures the levels of total, LDL (bad) and HDL (good) cholesterol, as well as the levels of triglycerides in the bloodstream. Total cholesterol

should be less than 200, LDL should be less than 100, HDL should be more than 40 and triglycerides should be less than 150.

- **Why it's important:** High cholesterol is symptomless, so a test is the only way to find out if you have it. High levels of LDL and triglycerides can raise your risk of heart attack and stroke down the road. And high cholesterol doesn't just affect older people or people who eat high-fat foods: About 20% of young people have high cholesterol, which is often hereditary.
- **How often:** Every four to six years or more often, depending on your results.

Reproductive health

Pap test: A Pap test, also called a Pap smear, tests for cervical cancer as well as abnormal cells that could lead to cervical cancer. It is performed by taking a swab of cervical cells.

- **Why it's important:** When detected early, cervical cancer is highly treatable. And abnormal cells can be

removed to prevent cervical cancer from ever developing.

- **How often:** Every one to three years, starting at age 21.

STI (sexually transmitted infection) test

STI tests are done in a number of ways, such as by drawing blood, taking a urine sample, swabbing the genital area and swabbing an area of infection. There are tests for STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes, syphilis, human papillomavirus (HPV) and more.

- **Why it's important:** STIs often have no symptoms, so you might not necessarily know you have one and you may unwittingly pass it on to a partner. Untreated, STIs can lead to serious consequences, such as pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility and cervical cancer.
- **How often:** Most gynecologists recommend annual testing, especially if a woman is not using condoms 100% of the time when sexually active.

Skin health

Skin cancer check: A dermatologist scans your body, including your scalp, underneath the fingernails and spots that are not usually exposed to the sun, for abnormalities, such as suspicious moles, sores and bumps.

- **Why it's important:** Melanoma is the second most common cancer among women ages 15 through 29, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. The deadliest type of skin cancer, melanoma is treatable when caught early.
- **How often:** Ask your dermatologist for a recommendation, which often depends on your personal and family history. ⓘ

Are your vaccines up to date?

Check with your healthcare providers about the following vaccines and any others they might recommend for you based on your personal or family medical history.

- ☐ Flu: once a year
- ☐ Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis: booster every 10 years
- ☐ Meningitis: every five years
- ☐ Measles, mumps, rubella: one or two doses
- ☐ Varicella (chickenpox): two doses
- ☐ Human papillomavirus (HPV): 2 or 3 doses, depending on age at initial vaccination

Get the facts about HPV

Human papillomavirus, or HPV, is the most common STI in the U.S.—and protecting yourself from it today can help you fend off certain cancers down the road.



DID YOU KNOW?

The HPV vaccine can protect against 90% of the HPV strains that cause cervical cancer!

About 80 million Americans—mostly in their late teens and early 20s, according to the CDC—are walking around with some strain of HPV (human papillomavirus), and many of them don’t even know it! The most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the U.S., HPV is also among the most stealthy. It can be transmitted through any form of sexual contact and usually has no symptoms, so you can pass it on without knowing it.

Why it’s serious

HPV cannot be treated, and although most infections clear on their own within two years, in some cases they can linger for longer—even decades, leading to consequences such as:

- **Genital warts.** These are small, fleshy bumps, often appearing in cauliflower-shaped groups, on the genital area. Sometimes, genital warts go away on their own, while other times they grow in size and number. Although they can be removed (never use over-the-counter wart-removal products on

genital warts), they often grow back. Keep in mind that you can still spread HPV to a partner even if warts have gone away or been removed.

- **Cancers.** Some strains of HPV can lead to cancer years or even decades after a person gets infected. Almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by HPV, and the infection is also linked to cancers of the vulva and vagina. In men, it may lead to cancer of the penis. And in both sexes, HPV may cause cancers of the anus and the back of the throat.

How to protect yourself

Fortunately, you can lower your risk of HPV by:

- **Getting vaccinated.** The HPV vaccine protects against most HPV strains that lead to cancer and genital warts. Because it’s best to get the vaccine before you’ve ever been exposed to HPV, the CDC recommends girls and boys receive the HPV vaccine, given in two doses, starting at age 11. However, teens

and young adults, ages 15-26, can still receive the vaccine (given in three doses).

Consider that the vaccine prevents new infection with HPV but will not treat an existing infection. That said, “there are over 100 strains of HPV, so even if you have been infected with one strain, you can still become infected with many others, and the HPV vaccine will prevent infections from over 90% of the other strains out there,” says Mary Jane Minkin, MD, FACOG, Clinical Professor, Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, Yale University School of Medicine.

Older than 26? “Almost all women are candidates for the HPV vaccine,” says Dr. Minkin. “If you haven’t received it yet, speak with your provider.”

- **Practicing safe sex.** See p. 18 for strategies that help you stay protected from HPV, as well as other common STIs, such as chlamydia, herpes, syphilis and gonorrhea. 📖

What’s up with your health?

Sure, your medical records keep track of things like any health conditions you may have and whether you’re up-to-date on vaccinations. But your doctor needs to know more about you to help ensure you’re in a good place today and moving in a healthy direction. Fill out the tool below and share it with your doctor, who may have some suggestions!

1. I eat a well-balanced diet that includes at least five servings of fruit and vegetables a day.
☐ every day
☐ most days (4-5 days/week)
☐ occasionally (2-3 days/week)
☐ never

2. I do some type of physical activity (such as dancing, yoga, walking, jogging, basketball, soccer):
☐ every day
☐ most days (4-5 days/week)
☐ occasionally (2-3 days/week)
☐ never

3. I feel like I’m at a healthy weight, and I am content with it.
☐ basically agree ☐ disagree
If you want to comment, add it here:

4. I have friends I enjoy spending time with. I’m pretty happy with my social life.
☐ basically agree ☐ disagree

5. I get ____ hours of sleep each night, on average.

6. My “home life” is:
☐ Warm and loving—I’m lucky!
☐ Basically okay. We have our ups and downs, good times and not-so-good times.
☐ Difficult. I can’t wait to move out.

7. I have hobbies and interests (such as reading, music, sports) that I enjoy.
☐ agree ☐ disagree

8. I am sexually active.
☐ yes ☐ no

9. I have learned about safe sex guidelines from:
☐ a class or other formal setting
☐ discussion with an adult
☐ my own reading or research

10. I am basically a happy person. I have things in my life I look forward to:
☐ most of the time
☐ some of the time
☐ no, I am not very happy

11. I have some go-to stress-management techniques.
☐ yes, and they include: _____

☐ no

12. Please check off how often, if at all, you:

	Daily	Occasionally	Never
smoke	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
drink alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
use drugs*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*for fun or pleasure, rather than for medical reasons

13. List any topics you’d like to discuss during your visit: _____

“We’re pursuing our dreams—and leading our healthiest lives!”

Whether juggling schoolwork, career or fun, Abbey, Casey and Gabriela are proof that even the busiest people have time for healthy habits. Here are the tips that help them feel their best! —BY KAREN KLEIMANN

“Live in the moment, but don’t forget about the future!”

Abbey Rebosio, 22
River Edge, NJ

“Since second grade, I knew I wanted to be a teacher,” says Abbey, who graduated from The College of NJ (TCNJ) with a degree in psychology. “Once I got involved in the school system as an undergrad, I saw a need for helping children with learning disabilities so they could reach their full potential.”

She’s now attending TCNJ for another year to pursue a master’s degree in special education and may consider becoming a reading specialist in the future. Abbey believes her degree in psychology will be particularly helpful in connecting with her students and colleagues, especially since COVID-19 has changed how schools and educators approach teaching.

ABBEY’S GO-TO TIPS!

Prep meals in advance. When living on campus with roommates, food prep was essential, says Abbey. “I’d go grocery shopping on Sundays and buy only what I would eat for the week and cook meals that night. If I planned to be at the library that week, I had meals ready to grab so I wouldn’t be tempted by fast food on the way.” She snacks on roasted Brussels sprouts or individual snack packages that make portion control easy. “I don’t believe in restrictive dieting, so I’ll have treats like ice cream on occasion, but I try to eat in a healthy way.”

Take Zen breaks. “I go for walks with my friends on nice days. TCNJ has beautiful parks and nature paths,” says Abbey, who also uses a meditation app when she feels tired or overwhelmed. “Music and driving are therapeutic, too. I love to drive and put on John Mayer or Ed Sheeran—they put me in a good mood so when I return, I feel restored and ready to tackle my schoolwork again.”

Be proactive. Abbey feels best and in control when she’s one step ahead. Take her studies: She’s started studying for a teacher certification exam that’s still a ways away. And she uses the same philosophy with regard to her health. For example, she got the HPV vaccine to prevent against the most common sexually transmitted infection before going to college: “I feel like I’ve been protected for longer, and it gives me greater peace of mind.” ▶

OVERWHELMED BY COMPETING OBLIGATIONS?

Abbey swears by her old-fashioned paper planner so she can map out her week and manage her to-do list. “I write on sticky notes and place them in my planner so I can visualize how each day is blocked off. That way I can get my work done and still have free time for friends, the gym and other activities.”



“Love what you do!”

Gabriela Martes-Urbe, 22
Garwood, NJ

Gabriela can already say she’s lived the life of a professional and is now on to her second career. Having spent two years in college studying exercise science, she was presented an opportunity to play professional women’s soccer overseas and jumped at the chance. She spent six months playing for a team in Sicily and then another six months playing for one in London.

In 2017, Gabriela came home with real-life experience she could bring to the fitness world and joined her family’s new gym as a manager, trainer and coach. She earned two certifications—Olympic weightlifting and CrossFit level 1—with the goal of helping every person she coaches find a reason to love activity.

“I work with people of all ages, so I customize workouts that help them reach their goals. My philosophy is anything you want to do, I will help you try to get there. I want to connect with others on many levels, not just fitness,” she says.

With COVID-19 affecting gyms, Gabriela is looking to finish her degree so she can build on her existing training and propel her career aspirations even further.

GABRIELA’S WINNING STRATEGIES!

Get out of your comfort zone.

Whether living abroad or trying new fitness techniques like hot yoga or kettlebells, Gabriela embraces challenges. “Each experience allows me to reflect on myself and my capabilities and develop resourcefulness.”



“Embracing challenges helps me understand my capabilities and develop my resources.”

Take advantage of vaccines.


Gabriela didn’t see a gynecologist until she was in her late teens, and it was only recently that she learned about the HPV vaccine that can ultimately protect against HPV-related cancers such as cervical and vaginal. So at her next doctor’s appointment, she’s planning to discuss getting the vaccine. “Cancer does run in my family, and for that personal reason, I would take any precaution to live a long, healthy life. Self-care should never be put to the side.”

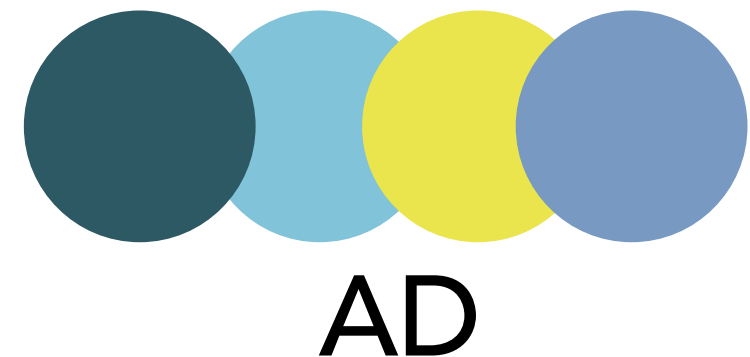
Use nutrition to build a healthy body.

“Breakfast sandwiches [with egg, cheese and bacon] were a big thing for me not too long ago,” she admits. But now she goes for a sandwich made with egg whites and avocado on whole wheat toast,

along with a cup of black coffee and a bit of organic cane sugar. She eats an hour before her workout to make sure she can get through her session, then within a half hour of finishing, she has a high-protein shake or snack. “Protein is important for muscle recovery and healing, so I can build lean muscle.”

Turn doubt into confidence.

Gabriela says she’s experienced anxiety at times, but setting realistic goals helps her feel proud of what she can accomplish. “I train a lot of people who are wary of working out in front of others. I talk to them about my own experience of pushing beyond my personal limits, not comparing myself to others. I hope by showing I’ve been there, too, they can feel better about themselves and look at fitness in a different way.” 



“Be patient with yourself!”

Casey Riebesehl, 24
Hopewell Junction, NY

Finding ways to balance the workload of an accelerated nursing program with a clinical rotation isn't easy, but Casey is up to the task. Now in her first year of nursing school at Concordia College in Bronxville, NY, she's looking forward to becoming a gastroenterology nurse.

“I always loved science growing up, so I knew I wanted to go into the field, but it wasn't until I developed a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), that I decided I wanted to become a nurse to help other patients like me,” she says.

And with COVID-19 hitting the state just as she began her second clinical rotation, she's using all the lessons she's learned to adapt to the unexpected, manage her time and prioritize her health.

CASEY'S ACTION PLAN!

Schedule study sessions.

Adjusting to living at home after years of dorm life—along with a shift to remote learning due to COVID-19—required Casey to change her approach to school. Her solution? Maintaining a to-do list, creating a work-only space, putting on classical music for concentration and setting aside time for studying. “I'm used to attending class in person, so online classes were a struggle. Keeping in touch with classmates and attending virtual study sessions to stay on top of

my studies helped a lot. I also find that prepping for class the way I normally would, even if it just means changing my clothes, puts me in another setting so I can focus my attention on class work.”

Get ahead of medical issues.

To help keep her body strong and avoid IBD flares, Casey makes sure to get restful sleep, stay hydrated and relax with tea, music, yoga and a journal. “Knowing I will also be caring for others with their own medical problems, I want to set a good example and be healthy so I can bring my best to work.” Casey adds that this includes getting wellness exams, taking medications as prescribed and asking her healthcare provider about ways she can protect herself. For example, she got the HPV vaccine before college. “I learned that having IBD puts me at an increased risk of cervical cancer, so I also get a yearly gynecological exam.”

Create a work/life balance.

Casey finds ways to keep the different aspects of her life separate so she can feel more in harmony. “At work it's important to build friendships and feel connected with colleagues. It's also essential to focus on my patients and the task at hand and not get distracted with personal issues.” When her shift ends, she tries to keep work at work. “I tend to get overly consumed in my job sometimes, so for me it's invaluable to have activities outside of work. I need time to myself to make sure I can perform my best when I return.”

“It's invaluable to have activities outside of work. I need time to myself to make sure I can perform my best when I return.”



Q&A

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT HPV



TOO LATE FOR THE HPV VACCINE?

Q *I'm 21 and have been sexually active since age 19. I never got the HPV vaccine; is it too late for me to get the shots now?*

A It is definitely not too late to get the HPV vaccine. It is recommended for all women between the ages of 11 and 26. Receiving the vaccine now will help keep you from becoming infected with over 90% of the known varieties of HPV.

I TESTED POSITIVE!

Q *My gyno just called to tell me that I tested positive for HPV. She said it often clears on its own, and we will see what happens at my next test. I have no symptoms at all. Am I supposed to tell my sexual partners that I have HPV in the meantime?*

A Your gynecologist is correct. Women fortunately do clear the majority of infections with HPV through their body's own immune system. If you are not in a mutually monogamous situation (meaning that you and/or your partner have other sexual partners), you should use condoms at all times anyway. If you are in an ongoing monogamous relationship and not using condoms, you should discuss this finding (I

always ask patients, "If your partner found out they had HPV, would you want them to tell you?") And you should also receive the HPV vaccine. There are more than 100 strains of HPV out there—and even if you had one strain, there are many more that the vaccine will protect you from (including 90% of the strains that can lead to cervical cancer). Protect yourself.

WILL I STILL NEED A PAP?

Q *I got the HPV shots, so does that mean I'm 100% protected from cervical cancer? And if that's the case, does that mean I won't need Pap smears?*

A Although the HPV vaccine is quite good, it's not 100% protective. So yes, you still need to do Pap smears—but the good news is you may not have to do them every year. Your gynecological healthcare provider will let you know your recommended schedule.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Q *My mom was against vaccines, so I didn't receive the HPV vaccine as an adolescent. I'm thinking about it now, at age 23, but I have some lingering fears of my own. Is it safe? Could it affect my fertility down the road?*

A The HPV vaccine is quite safe. The main side effect that some women do get is soreness at the injection site, which may last for a few days. Some women report fatigue, headache, or a low grade fever, which may last for a few days. In my experience, I truly have seen extremely few side effects.

WILL WARTS GO AWAY?

Q *I went to my gyno after noticing fleshy bumps around my vulva. She said I had genital warts, which are a symptom of HPV. She said there's no treatment for HPV, so am I stuck with the warts forever? Is it possible to have them removed?*

A Warts may well go away on their own, as the body will clear the virus by itself in many situations. However, if warts do persist we have many ways to treat them. There are several prescription medications that can treat your warts. Doctors can also freeze warts or use a laser to remove them. So if you do have persistent warts you can speak to your healthcare provider about getting rid of them. In addition, I would definitely recommend you get the HPV vaccine because there are many varieties of HPV, and being infected with one strain will not protect you from other strains. 📌



OUR EXPERT:
Mary Jane Minkin, MD, FACOG, Clinical Professor, Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences, Yale University School of Medicine

Make your exam a breeze!

If you're like many women, you're probably not thrilled about going to your exam. Yet some of the reasons it's dreaded can be easily overcome.

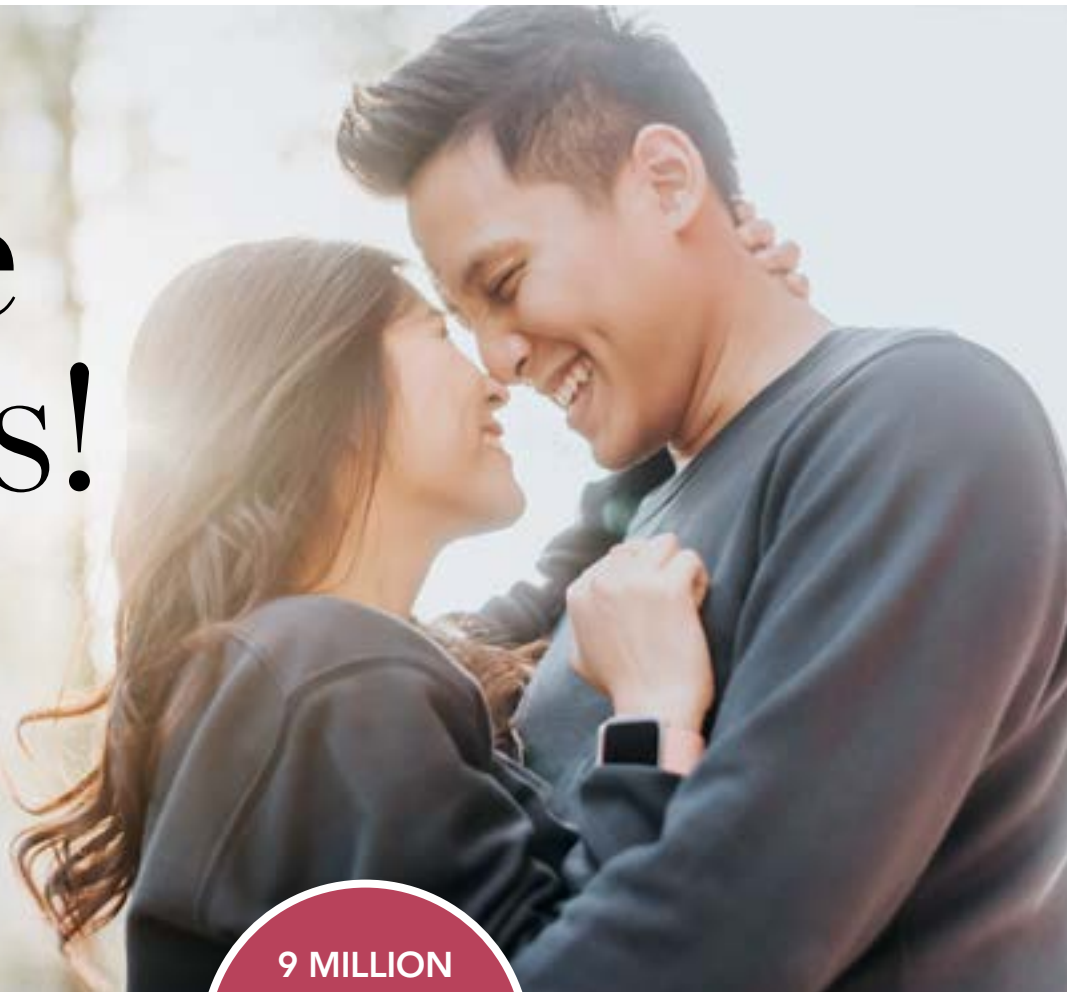
- **Dodge any discomfort.** During an exam your healthcare provider may need to insert a speculum—if you're worried about discomfort while it's being used, you can request the smallest one possible and ask that it be warmed up before it's inserted (or ask for a plastic one, which is naturally less cold than metal). As the speculum is inserted, inhale deeply and exhale slowly. Relaxing helps loosen pelvic muscles, making the exam faster and easier.
- **Schedule shrewdly.** If you need a Pap smear, try to make sure you're not going to be actively menstruating when your exam is scheduled, as that can sometimes cause errors in the test

results. It's also best to avoid sex for about 24 hours prior to the exam, as certain lubricants and even the presence of sperm can affect Pap results.

- **Ask about the urine sample.** If you'll need to give one, ask if you can give it before the exam. The pelvic exam is often less uncomfortable with an empty bladder.
- **Keep this in mind:** During your exam, your healthcare provider isn't judging your weight, your below-the-belt grooming, the number of sex partners you have or the type of sex you've tried. Really!

Stay safe from STIs!

You learned about human papillomavirus (HPV) on p. 8, but that's just one sexually transmitted infection (STI). Chlamydia, herpes, syphilis and gonorrhea are others, and because they are often symptomless, you can be infected by any one of them and not know it. STIs can lead to very serious health consequences, so it's smart to lower your risk with the strategies below!



9 MILLION
American women
are diagnosed
with an STI
each year.

♦ **Get regular checkups.**

Let your care providers know you're sexually active. They can recommend the STI tests that make sense based on your sexual history (and your partner's, too). Don't forget to ask about the vaccinations that can protect you against certain STIs.

♦ **Know how STIs spread.**

They can travel from partner to partner (it doesn't matter whether your partner is male or female); during vaginal, oral or anal sex; during genital touching (no intercourse); and from a mother to her unborn child or to a baby who is nursing.

♦ **Understand the consequences of STIs.**

This includes problems conceiving or during pregnancy, health problems for an unborn child, organ damage and infection that travels to other parts of the body. HPV alone is linked to six cancers, including cervical, vulvar and vaginal.

♦ **Starting a new relationship?**

Ask your partner to be tested! Say, "I want to make sure we are both safe, so I will get tested first, if you like. And I would like you to get tested, too. That will make me feel more relaxed about having sex." You should also get tested for COVID-19.

♦ **Practice mutual monogamy.**

If you're in a relationship, have sex only with each other. It'll lessen your risk for getting an STI as well as COVID-19.

♦ **Use a condom.** And have him put it on before his penis touches your vagina, mouth or anus. (Note: The condom may not cover areas where there are genital warts or herpes blisters.)

♦ **Don't douche.** Douching can actually increase your risk for

STIs, since it removes vaginal bacteria that can protect you against infection!

♦ **Check out any vaginal irritation you experience.**

Some women who rely heavily on condoms, foams, gels and suppositories containing nonoxynol-9, a spermicide sometimes abbreviated as N-9, may develop irritated vaginal tissue that increases their risk for certain types of infection.

♦ **Stay sober.** Drinking alcohol heavily and using drugs can result in poor decisions and impulsive behavior. It can also increase your risk for sexual assault. 🚫

Are you well matched?

You and your partner are building a strong, healthy relationship if...

- **You can be your own person—and vice versa.**
You feel free to say what's on your mind and can easily say no to something that doesn't interest you or that makes you uncomfortable. And so can they!
- **You trust each other.**
You and your partner give each other room for other friendships, activities and obligations.
- **You strike a fair balance.**
You take turns deciding the things you'll do together—including who you'll hang out with (not always their buds or yours) and where to go.
- **You check in with each other.**
You update each other on any plans that will affect you both.
- **You can share your weaknesses.**
You can open up to each other—without feeling that you'll be judged. You make each other feel loved and secure—and don't throw things back at each other later.



5 ways to let off steam!



From large-scale stuff (COVID concerns, current events) to everyday challenges (school or work deadlines, finances, what's college gonna be like in the fall?), it's no wonder you feel like a ball of stress! And you wouldn't be the only one: Six in 10 college students reported overwhelming anxiety in a 2019 survey by the American College Health Association—and that was pre-pandemic!

Unfortunately, letting the tension build can set the stage for symptoms like exhaustion, brain fog, insomnia, migraines, hair loss, a messed up menstrual cycle and more.

While long-term strategies, such as meditation, a yoga practice and therapy, can help, don't underestimate the power of in-the-moment techniques: "They instantly trigger the relaxation response," says Bonnie Freirich, LCSW, based in northern New Jersey. "Other benefits include increased concentration and a memory boost."

So take a deep breath and read on for these quick—and fun!—stress busters:

1 Chew (sugar-free) gum! Several studies, including those published in the journals

Physiology & Behavior, *Stress and Health* and *Appetite*, have uncovered a link between gum chewing and stress reduction. Seems that chomping on a stick or two for 10-20 minutes not only lowers levels of the stress hormone cortisol, but also raises alertness and ability to multi-task. Researchers think that the physical act of chewing helps release tension.

2 Hum! Can't seem to stop the worry loop in your brain? An ancient yoga breathing technique called the bumble bee breath helps quiet your thinking, create calm and even help with sleep, says Freirich. To do, cover your eyes with your second and third fingers and use your thumbs to "plug" your ears. Then inhale slowly, keeping lips tightly sealed, and exhale while making a humming sound. "Research shows that the bumble bee breath even changes brain waves for several days!" she adds.

3 Blow up a balloon Here's a case for stashing some deflated balloons in your purse or pocket: Blowing one up forces you to take in big, deep breaths and exhale slowly. In turn, you'll activate your

parasympathetic nervous system, which slows heart rate and relaxes muscles. That's key when stress has you taking short, shallow breaths that can quicken your heartbeat and make you feel faint.

4 Make like a tree Assuming the tree pose, a basic yoga pose that requires you to balance on one foot while the other is pressed against your knee, can nip mounting tension on the spot. The reason: When you are focusing on holding steady, it's nearly impossible for other thoughts to enter your mind. If your mind wanders, you'll lose your balance.

5 Stop and swap Sometimes you just can't help it. Out of nowhere, an anxious thought pops into your head: "What if I forgot to turn off the oven?" "My boss doesn't like me." "Why wasn't I invited to Jan's birthday party?" The second you notice it, tell yourself: "Self, stop!" That prevents the nagging thought from taking hold. Next, replace it with something pleasant: Recall the last compliment you got, remember something funny, think about what you'd like to do this weekend. 🍷

FDA AD

Your window of opportunity? *It's now!*

If you're anywhere from, say, 18 to 28, questions like these may be swirling in your head:

- “How will COVID affect my college experience?”
- “Will I get along with my college roommate and dormmates and make friends?”
- “Can I avoid the pressure to drink to excess or do drugs?”
- “Can I maintain a healthy weight and achieve other wellness goals?”
- “Am I choosing the right study/career path?”
- “How can I find happiness and feel secure in my intimate relationships?”
- “Can't I work part-time/backpack/kick back for a few years instead of settling into ‘real life’ right away?”
- “What can I do to have a safe and healthy sex life?”

Fact is, while the decade ahead may be filled with uncertainty, it is also the time to create a vision for the future and take steps to make it happen. According to Meg Jay, PhD, author of *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter—And How To Make The Most Of Them Now* (Twelve, 2013), “Your twenties matter. Eighty percent of life's most defining moments take place by age 35.”

So whether you're college-bound, jumping into a job, switching careers or considering a relationship, take a deep breath, and spend some time thinking about *your* life plan. Take a look at the following checklists—you may get an idea or two that helps bring your vision to life.

EXPLORE YOUR JOB PATH

- ☐ Make a list of jobs that truly excite you (not the ones you think you should do because of prestige or parental pressure).
- ☐ Find out what skills/education are needed to see if you're a good fit.
- ☐ Search for internships or research assistantships in your selected field.
- ☐ Seek out and talk with people in those jobs.
- ☐ Develop your résumé and keep it up to date.
- ☐ Create a LinkedIn profile.
- ☐ Scrub your social media presence of questionable photos and words.
- ☐ Find mentors, whether you're job-searching, interning or are already on the job.
- ☐ Don't be afraid to pivot! For example, some people find fulfilling jobs in areas outside their field of study.



NURTURE YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

- ☐ Be open to “weak ties”—i.e., people outside your inner circle. Research shows they may introduce you to new ideas and experiences and enlarge your network of job and romantic prospects.
- ☐ If you're in college, attend campus events or join campus organizations—they provide automatic talking points.
- ☐ Take relationships to a deeper level with one-on-one time (a walk, a meal).
- ☐ Avoid “friends” who pressure you into doing things that are unsafe, unhealthy or make you uncomfortable.
- ☐ Maintain ties with geographically distant friends through Zoom or FaceTime.
- ☐ Practice vulnerability: That might mean expressing what you really think and feel, and asking for what you need—even if it means risking rejection.
- ☐ Figure out if social media is making you stressed, overwhelmed or depressed. Experiment by taking a week-long break.

SET YOURSELF UP FOR FINANCIAL STABILITY

- ☐ Make savings automatic. Contribute to your employer's 401k plan; open an IRA if you're self-employed; enroll in your bank's “keep the change”-type plan.
- ☐ Make debt-paying automatic, too. Set up plans to pay off your student loans and other debt each month.
- ☐ Establish a good credit score. Make small credit card purchases each month and pay them in full and on time. (If you can't get a credit card, consider a secured card, which requires you to have enough cash to cover your available credit.)
- ☐ Avoid buying anything on credit if you can't pay for it out of pocket. Tip: You don't need it (or maybe even want it) just because others have it.
- ☐ Know your checking account balance. You should have an idea of what you have at all times to avoid overspending or bouncing checks.

LAY THE FOUNDATION OF A SOLID RELATIONSHIP

- ☐ Date with intention. Give serious thought to the people you spend time with.
- ☐ Avoid “killing time”—i.e., sliding into a long-term relationship, and maybe even living, with someone you don't feel has lifelong potential.
- ☐ Actively choose partners rather than getting involved with someone just because they show interest.
- ☐ Look for similarity. Forget “opposites attract”: Multiple studies suggest that the more you have in common with someone (education, age, ethnicity, intelligence, attitudes, values and so on), the more compatible you'll be over the long haul.
- ☐ End relationships with anyone who makes you feel “less than.”

STAY HEALTHY

- ☐ Assemble a team of healthcare providers you trust and can open up to.
- ☐ If you're in college, visit the healthcare center to see what resources are available to you.
- ☐ Keep up-to-date on exams, screenings and vaccines (see p. 6). Take charge of any underlying conditions, such as diabetes, gastrointestinal conditions or chronic migraine.
- ☐ Practice safe sex. See p. 18 for strategies that protect you from sexually transmitted infections, such as HPV, chlamydia and herpes.
- ☐ Check in with your emotional health. Take Mental Health America's self-assessments at [screening.mhanational.org](https://www.mhanational.org).
- ☐ Create a fitness menu. Combine an active lifestyle (walk and climb stairs when you can, stand rather than sit, etc.) with exercises you love (yoga, ping-pong, cross-fit, hiking, volleyball, etc.).
- ☐ Dig into nutritious meals. Make veggies, fruits, lean protein, legumes, low-fat dairy and whole grains your staples. Need convenience? Rotisserie chicken, sushi, steamed veggie dumplings and salads are good options. Be mindful of portions, avoid sugar and limit alcohol consumption to no more than one or two drinks a day. 🍷



Questions to ask your care team today!

Here's what to ask at your next exam
to make sure you're on a healthy track.



1. What is my overall health status? _____
2. Am I at greater risk for certain diseases, and if so, what can I do to lower it? _____

3. Am I up to date on my screenings? _____
4. Am I up to date on my vaccines, including the HPV vaccine? _____
5. Is it too late for me to get the HPV vaccine if I didn't get it (or complete it) during adolescence? _____

6. How else can I protect myself from sexually transmitted infections? _____

7. What lifestyle steps do you recommend? _____

8. Should I be doing any self-monitoring? _____
9. How can I monitor my mental well-being? _____

10. What birth control options might be best for me? _____

11. Do you recommend I see any other specialists or healthcare providers, such as a registered dietitian, psychologist or social worker? _____
