

# 8 ways college women can protect their health

September 11 2017

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(HealthDay)—The start of college means it's time for young women to take charge of their health.

Dr. Aparna Sridhar, an assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, Los Angeles, offers several tips in a university news release.

**Know your health status.** Talk to your parents and your doctor to make sure you're up-to-date with health screenings, shots and prescriptions. Ask about the status of allergies and other health issues.

**Guard against HPV.** Sridhar said college students should make sure they have been immunized for [human papilloma virus](#) (HPV), a [sexually transmitted infection](#). "It can cause cervical cancer but can be prevented by the HPV vaccination and screening with pap smears," she said.

**Know how to get health care on campus.** Find out the location of the closest health center that accepts your insurance.

**Keep track of menstrual cycles.** Being aware of your cycle will allow you to provide specifics to doctors if there's an issue. "When I ask my patients when their last period was, the first thing they do is open their cellphone. Many women are tracking their cycles through apps now," Sridhar said. You might also want to track your mood, cramps and [birth control](#) use.

**Protect yourself during sex.** Consider condom use to guard against [sexually transmitted diseases](#) (STDs). Prevent unplanned pregnancies by using birth control and emergency contraception after unprotected sex.

**Don't tolerate sexual abuse or violence.** One in four undergraduate women is sexually assaulted on campus. Consult the campus website or your dorm's resident assistant for help reporting an assault.

**Follow good hygiene habits.** Change sanitary protection as recommended. Use fragrance-free, pH-neutral soap in the vaginal area

instead of scented soaps or shampoos. Avoid feminine sprays, douches or powders.

"Vaginal discharge is abnormal if you have itching, redness and pain," Sridhar said. "I recommend patients to see a doctor if they have discharge that is greenish-yellow, foamy or a bad smell."

**Beware of urinary tract infections.** "Drink plenty of water to flush out your system and talk to your doctor if you have pain and frequent urination with burning," Sridhar said. "If neglected, these can lead to kidney infections." Always urinate after having sex.

**More information:** For more about women's health, visit [womenshealth.gov](http://womenshealth.gov).

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Citation: 8 ways college women can protect their health (2017, September 11) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-09-ways-college-women-health.html>

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