

# Women's Health

during the COVID-19 pandemic

A guide to help keep your health in check



DPV  
Health®



## Taking care of your health during **Covid-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has put many things on hold, but your general health shouldn't be one of them.

If you've been putting off seeing your GP out of fear of the coronavirus, you don't need to. Staying on track with regular health checks and screens is a great way to stay out of hospital, which should be everyone's goal right now.

Most women have a range of healthcare needs that shouldn't be put off. From contraception and fertility issues through to mental health worries, periods, pregnancy, cervical screening, menopause, and beyond, it's important to check in with your GP.

If you're worried about a face-to-face meeting, you might also be able to access some services over the phone or on a telehealth video call. COVID-19 will be around for many months to come. Don't put your health and wellbeing on hold. It's safe to visit your doctor and we are only a phone call away.

DPV Health has a comprehensive Women's Health Clinic. You can see a nurse, a GP, and access allied health support.

Book in today for a check-up!



## Quick Tip

*“Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly and avoid alcohol and drugs.”*

# Mental Health

If you're living with depression and/or anxiety, or if the worry of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has got you down, we can help. As a woman you may be used to putting the needs of others first, but it is important to get help and support when you need it.

Here are some things that you can do:

### Take Care Of Your Physical Health

- by staying active with exercise
- following physical distancing rules
- eating a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables

### Stay Connected To Others

Keeping in touch with family and friends is important, even when you are physical distancing. Try reaching out and sharing the mental load with others through:

- phone calls
- video chats
- online groups
- talking to neighbours (stay 1.5 meters apart)

### Create New Routines

Having routines in our day can give us a sense of structure and achievement. If you feel like things are out of control, create some new routines. This will be helpful if you are struggling with home learning or even working from home.

## LGBTIQ Community

There is a significant body of evidence, in Australia and internationally, to suggest that LGBTIQ people experience anxiety and depression are at higher rates than their heterosexual peers and at greater risk of suicide and self-harm<sup>1</sup>.

Australian and international studies show that LGBTIQ people under-utilise health services and delay seeking treatment due to actual or anticipated experiences of stigma and discrimination from service providers. It's important to get help when needed sooner than later<sup>2</sup>.

At DPV Health we offer counselling and other mental health services without judgement and we respect your confidentiality and privacy.

Our health professionals are trained to provide support for all community members with diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

<sup>1</sup> Rainbow Help Victoria <sup>2</sup> Rainbow Help Victoria

## Family & Domestic Violence

The coronavirus pandemic has significantly affected many aspects of our daily life. It has led to higher levels of stress, uncertainty, social isolation and financial pressure. But none of this can be used as an excuse for violence.

Research shows that about 1 in 4 women has experienced at least one incident of non-physical abuse from a partner, yet overall we are less likely to recognise the non-physical signs.

Non-physical abuse is often a pre-cursor to physical abuse, hence it is important to recognise the signs early on.

Both family violence and domestic violence include behaviours such as:

- physical violence (hitting, choking, use of weapons)
- emotional abuse, also known as psychological abuse (intimidating, humiliating)
- coercive control (controlling access to finances, monitoring movements, isolating from friends and family)<sup>2</sup>.

Don't suffer in silence, if your mental health is suffering from Family or Domestic Violence please call our GP's for a referral and we can help you to manage your mental health and well-being.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Health & Human Services

### Quick Tip

*"Keep emergency numbers on your speed dial for 24 hour support. Domestic Violence Helpline 1800 671 458."*

# Cervical Screening

Staying up to date with cervical screening tests is one of the best ways to prevent cervical cancer. If you're due for a cervical screening test, or if you've never had one, make an appointment today.

## What is cervical screening?

A cervical screening test is a quick and simple way to test your cervix for the human papillomavirus (HPV) which can cause cervical cancer. Cervical screening tests can detect changes to your cervix and they allow your doctor to monitor any changes that may require intervention.

## Does the test hurt?

The test does not usually hurt. Cervical screening tests are more accurate than Pap tests, and they feel very similar. Most women say that the test is a little uncomfortable, but it doesn't usually hurt. You can also ask for a female health care provider to do the test.

## Who should have the test?

All women aged 25-75 years old who have ever been sexually active should have the test. This includes people who identify as transgender or lesbian, as well as those who have had the HPV vaccine.

## Quick Tip

*"If hot flashes are keeping you up at night, keep your bedroom cooler and try drinking small amounts of cold water before bed."*

# Menopause

Menopause brings about a range of bodily changes and it's normal for women to seek assistance from their general practitioners during this time. If you're having trouble with irregular menstrual cycles, abnormal bleeding patterns, mood changes or any other symptoms that are interfering with daily life, talk to your GP today. The DPV Health's Medical Centre's are open, and safe to visit during the COVID-19 crisis.

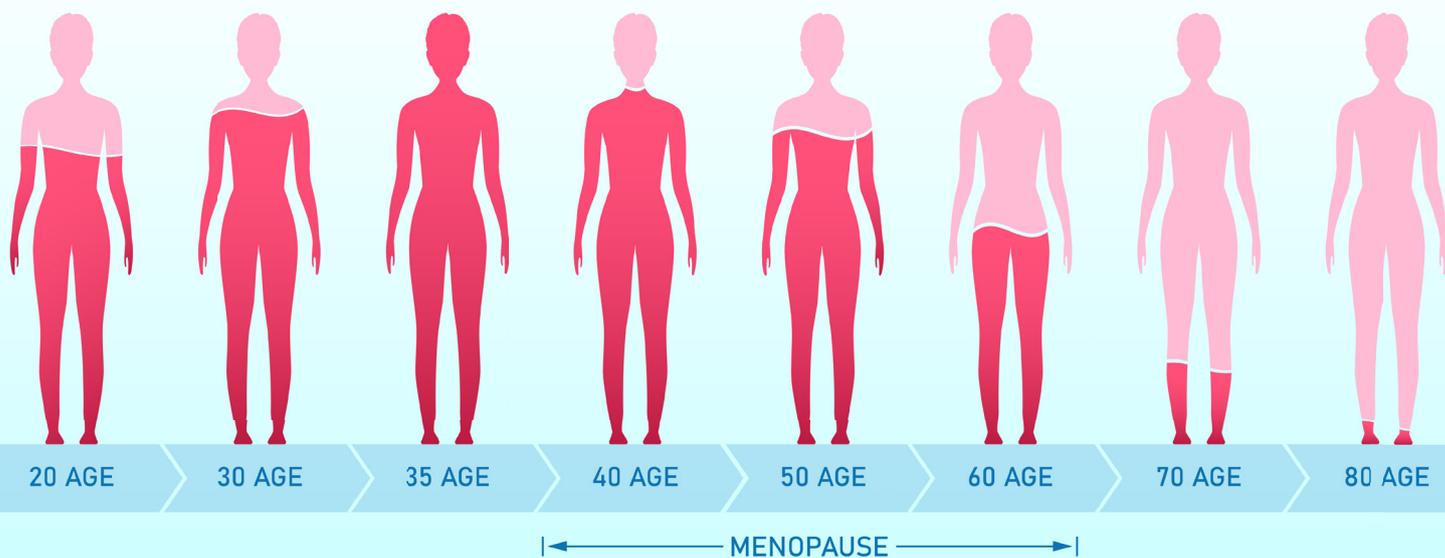
## What is menopause?

Menopause is a point of time 12 months after a woman's last period<sup>1</sup>. It represents the end of a woman's fertility. For most women periods can be quite irregular as they approach menopause. This means that the only way to really know that you have had your final period is to have not had one for 12 months.

<sup>1</sup> [www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-menopause](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-menopause)

## ESTROGEN HORMONE LEVEL

Estrogen deficiency  
Estrogen level



### When does menopause occur?

Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45-55 years. In Australia the average age for women to reach menopause is 51-52. Some women will start earlier or later. Menopause can also be brought about due to cancer treatments or surgery.

### Three stages of menopause

Menopause happens in three stages:

1. Perimenopause – the lead-up to menopause, when you're running out of eggs
2. Menopause – the final menstrual period
3. Postmenopause – when you have not had a period for 12 months

### Perimenopause symptoms and management

Common perimenopause symptoms include:

- periods become less regular
- periods become heavier or lighter, and last for longer or finish earlier
- hot flashes
- mood changes
- migraines
- difficulty doing normal activities

- bloating
- aches and pains
- sore or tender breasts
- bleeding between periods or after sex
- painful periods

Depending on your medical history, your doctor may suggest one of the following management options:

- combined oral contraceptive pill
- menopausal hormone therapy (MHT)
- an inter-uterine device (IUD) to help with heavy bleeding
- natural therapies by an accredited naturopath

### When to see a doctor

If menopause symptoms such as heavy or irregular bleeding, mood swings, migraines or hot flashes are causing you concern, talk to your doctor today.



# Contraception, family planning and fertility

The COVID-19 lockdowns in Victoria mean that many people are spending a lot more time at home. Some women are taking this time to think about issues like fertility and starting a family, while others want to avoid getting pregnant and need access to reliable contraception. Wherever you happen to be on your personal journey, the doctors at DPV Health can help.

## Contraception

If you want to have sex but don't want to get pregnant you need to use contraception.

There are many types of contraception available and your doctor can help you find an option that is right for you. Remember, no contraception is 100% effective, and most contraceptives will not protect you against sexually transmitted diseases and infections. If you don't use contraception every time you have sex, there is a chance that you could get pregnant.

## Contraception types

Your doctor can talk to you about which contraceptive options are right for you. There are a few different options for you to consider. These include:

### Contraceptive implants

A small plastic rod that is placed under the skin in the upper arm. These slowly release a low-dose of progesterone which stops you ovulating. These implants will last for three years and can be easily removed if you want to get pregnant later on.

### Intra uterine device

An IUD is a small device that is placed inside the uterus. An IUD stops sperm from reaching and fertilising an egg. It is inserted by a doctor and can be removed by a doctor or nurse later on so that you can get pregnant if you want to. IUDs last for around five years.

### Oral contraceptive pills

These are pills that must be swallowed every day. There are two main types of contraceptive pills:

#### *The combined oral contraceptive pill*

This pill stops the ovaries from releasing an egg each month. It is very effective if used correctly.

#### *The progestogen-only pill (mini pill)*

This pill doesn't stop you from ovulating and instead changes the mucus at the entrance to the uterus so that sperm cannot pass through. This is also very effective when used correctly.

### Contraceptive injection

This is a long-lasting progesterone hormone that is given as an injection every 12 weeks.

### Male condom

A thin rubber covering that is worn on an erect penis and stops sperm from entering the vagina. Condoms are effective and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections.

### Female condom

A latex-free condom that fits inside the vagina and stays in place with a flexible ring worn around the vulva. Female condoms are more expensive and less readily available than male condoms.

### Diaphragm

A shallow bendable cup that is placed inside the vagina. It covers the cervix during sex to prevent pregnancy. Diaphragms are moderately effective and are usually used with spermicide.

## Family planning and fertility

DPV Health provides a friendly, non-judgemental family planning service. We're here to talk to you about:

- Starting a family
- Fertility concerns
- Limiting the size of your family
- Contraception options and services
- Pregnancy termination

### What's next?

Call us to book in for a confidential appointment on 1300 234 263.

*Look out for the new DPV Health Women's Health clinic opening in Mill Park soon!*

### Quick Tip

*"Even the most effective birth control methods can fail. But your chances of getting pregnant are lower if you use a more effective method."*





### Quick Tip

*“Take folate in the weeks before and up to three months after you get pregnant.”*

## Pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a time of great excitement and joy. It can also be a time of uncertainty and stress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many pregnant women are feeling worried about their own health and that of their unborn baby. If you're pregnant and are worried about catching COVID-19, talk to a GP at DPV Health. We offer a range of telehealth, antenatal and shared care services.

### Do pregnant women have a greater risk of becoming infected with COVID-19?

According to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, there is currently no evidence to suggest that pregnant women have a greater risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 than non-pregnant women.

### If I have COVID-19 will my unborn baby also catch it?

While there are a small number of reported cases where COVID-19 has been passed from a mother to her unborn baby, it is rare for this to happen. When babies have been infected, most have remained well and have not needed additional care. There is little evidence to suggest that COVID-19 will harm your baby or cause abnormalities.

### Can I still access shared care antenatal check-ups?

Yes. Staying on track with your routine check ups during pregnancy is important for your health and your baby's health. At DPV Health, we care about you and your baby and we're taking extra steps to reduce your risk of coming into contact with the COVID-19 virus. This means that we may offer you some telehealth sessions, or try to limit your antenatal visits and waiting times.

### What to do if you feel anxious?

The team at DPV Health understand that it's normal to feel worried and we want to reassure you that if you follow the physical distancing guidelines, wash your hands regularly and wear a mask in public, the risk to you and your baby is small.

If your anxiety is interrupting your daily life, or if you are worried about your safety or mental health, call us today and we can help.



### Quick Tip

*"If this is your first pregnancy and you're not experiencing any problems, it's likely you'll have about 8 to 10 appointments."*

## Antenatal care

If you are pregnant you may be thinking about your options for obstetric care. Some of our GPs offer a shared care antenatal service with our local hospitals. This might be a great option for you if you would prefer to see a GP more regularly and only make occasional visits to the hospital.

### What is shared care?

Shared care is an arrangement where your pregnancy care is divided between your local hospital and your GP. Shared care lets you have some antenatal appointments with your GP and others at the hospital. Usually your hospital visits are for things like tests and scans.

Shared care is usually offered for women with low-risk pregnancies. GP's who offer shared care have extra training and qualifications in obstetric care. They also have a special arrangement in place with the local maternity hospital.

### What are the benefits of shared care?

Shared care means fewer visits to the hospital and more contact with your GP. It also means that the same GP who cared for you throughout pregnancy will be able to continue to care for you and your baby in the weeks and months after the birth.

Shared care is also great if you speak English as a second language and your GP speaks your first language and understands your cultural needs.

### How to make a shared care arrangement?

If you would like to have a shared care arrangement, talk to your GP. We have several GPs at DPV Health who can assist you with a shared care plan.

### What's next?

Call DPV Health today and talk to us about whether a shared care plan is right for you. We offer telehealth and face to face consults.

## Quick Tip

*“Drinking a cup of cinnamon or ginger tea or both can help you to fight against really bad cramps during your period. The ginger tea has been found to serve as an anti-inflammatory which can help reduce pain.”*

# Period pain and period problems

Period pain and period problems can happen at any time and it's important to know that support is available to you. If you're worried about period problems but are putting off coming into the clinic because you're worried about COVID-19, call our clinic today.

## What are period problems?

Menstrual cycles can bring about a range of uncomfortable symptoms, including mild cramping and fatigue. These symptoms usually go away when your period begins. For some women however, more serious issues can occur. If your period is too heavy, or too light, or if it is missing or painful, you may need to see your GP.

## What is PMS?

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is the term given to a range of emotional and physical symptoms that many women experience before their period. These symptoms include:

- anxiety
- irritability
- difficulty concentrating
- nervous tension
- depression
- mood swings
- aggression
- lower libido
- fluid retention
- abdominal bloating
- breast swelling
- headaches / migraines

- poor concentration
- increased weight
- constipation or diarrhoea
- food cravings
- aches and pains
- fibroids

## Heavy periods

Heavy periods are a common menstrual problem. They can also be upsetting and disrupt your daily life. If you are bleeding more than normal, or if your period is lasting longer than five to seven days, have a talk to your GP. Heavy periods are often caused by imbalances in hormone levels, especially estrogen and progesterone. They can also be caused by:

- changes in exercise or diet
- inflammation or infection
- fibroids
- puberty
- perimenopause

## Absent or irregular periods

Sometimes, women don't get their period, or their periods are irregular. Common causes of missing or irregular period include:

- pregnancy
- anorexia
- ovarian cysts
- stopping birth control
- sudden weight loss or gain
- breastfeeding
- menopause

# Remember to stay on track with your healthcare

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about so many changes to our daily lives, and it's important to stay on track with your healthcare.

At DPV Health, we understand that mental and physical health are both important parts of your wellbeing. That's why our GPs provide a whole-person care approach. If you're worried about a women's health issue, or if you or a member of your family need assistance, talk to us today.

For more information about our services call **1300 234 263** or **book online at: [www.dpvhealth.org.au](http://www.dpvhealth.org.au)**



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- > Open Saturdays
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- > Female & Male Doctors
- > Telehealth Available

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DPV Health is an inclusive organisation that celebrates the diversity of all people within our communities. We are passionate about helping to support people to lead happy healthy lives. We are dedicated to working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Disability, LGBTIQ, and newly arrived communities.

DPV Health acknowledges the traditional Custodians, Elders and lands of the Wurundjeri people.

DPV Health is committed to the Victorian Child Safe Standards in policy and in practice, to promote and protect the best interests of all children involved in our services.



We offer  
**free interpreter**  
services



Registered NDIS  
Provider

