

Hartford

Hartford's Report Card

We grade major aspects of life in the region



FEB 2010 \$3.95



Healthy... and wise

by Alicia B. Smith

When it comes to health issues, most women – especially mothers – tend to pay attention to everybody's symptoms but their own.

■ Unfortunately, downplaying their own illnesses or putting off "routine" tests can sometimes have serious, even life-threatening, consequences.

Women are at particular risk for a handful of diseases that they might not give much thought to, as long as they're feeling reasonably well.

We spoke to local medical experts to tell us which aspects of their health women should be most vigilant about, and the signs of potential trouble they should watch out for.

Dr. Desmond Ebanks
Founder and Medical Director
Alternity Healthcare
(860) 561-2287
alternityhealthcare.com



Dr. Amy Johnson
Obstetrician-Gynecologist
Hartford Hospital
(860) 545-1377
harthosp.org

Dr. Anita Kelsey
Cardiologist
Saint Francis Hospital
(860) 714-4821
stfrancis.org



Dr. Caroline Runowicz
Director
Carole and Ray Neag
Comprehensive Cancer Center
UConn Medical Center
(860) 535-6232
cancer.uconn.edu

Osteoporosis

■ Osteoporosis, or bone loss and fragility, affects 44 million Americans, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation. Sixty-eight percent of them are women.

The disease can cause hunched backs, overall lack of strength and a higher risk of fractures. In older women, a broken hip can trigger a chain of events that leads to an untimely death.

"It's a silent disease, and it's something that can be debilitating. The sad thing is, is that it is a preventable disease," said Dr. Desmond Ebanks, founder and director of Alternity

Healthcare in West Hartford.

Because hormones are necessary in order to grow bone, many women begin to lose bone mass following menopause.

Specific risk factors for osteoporosis are: female gender, increasing age, family history, infrequent menstrual cycles, a sedentary lifestyle, excessive alcohol consumption and race. White and Asian women have the highest risk. Ways to prevent bone loss include:

- start hormone replacement therapy
- follow an alkaline diet that includes more cruciferous vegetables
- do resistance exercises regularly
- build muscle mass through exercise
- avoid smoking
- take Vitamin D and calcium supplements.

"Vitamin D is very, very important," Ebanks said. It helps the calcium be absorbed into the

body. But, he adds, "80 to 85 percent of the U.S. population is deficient in Vitamin D."

In terms of caring for a woman's bone health, Ebanks breaks from conventional medicine. He said a woman's bone mass is at a peak when she is in her 20s, but that changes after menopause.

"Half of all women age 50 will experience a fracture due to osteoporosis," Ebanks said. "Wouldn't it make sense to screen earlier?"

Rather than wait until she is 50 years old or has finished menopause to screen for bone loss, "if we screen at age 40, we'll catch more women early." **HM**

American Cancer Society
Southern New England Region
825 Brook Street
1-91 Tech Center
Rocky Hill
(203) 379-4700
cancer.org

National Cervical Cancer Coalition
6520 Platt Avenue #693
West Hills, CA
(800) 685-5531
nccc-online.org

American Heart Association
5 Brookside Drive
Wallingford
(203) 294-0088
americanheart.org

National Osteoporosis Foundation
1150 17th Street NW
Suite 850
Washington, DC
(800) 231.4222
nof.org

National Breast Cancer Foundation
nationalbreastcancer.org