Mercy Medical Center—Sioux City

Q: How can I better manage my health?

A: Choosing a health care professional who stays up-to-date on new medical advances. Also, take time to assess how risk-sensitive you are to determine what sort of medical treatments you would be willing to undergo, if necessary.

Ask your healthcare professional a lot of questions pertinent to your health condition or concern.

And, get regular screenings.

Q: What does it mean to be at risk for a disease?

A: Being at risk for developing a particular disease means that you run a greater chance of developing the condition than someone else, but it doesn't mean you'll definitely develop the condition. In many cases, you can do a lot to minimize your risks.

Q: How can I take my medications most effectively?

A: All drugs have different effects if you take them with or without food, at different times a day, in different quantities or when you combine them with other drugs. The key is to communicate very precisely with your health care professional to learn the best approach and also to determine whether or not you may expect any minor or major side effects.

Q: What can I do to prepare for a doctor's visit?

A: You can get the most out of your visit by:

- Organizing your thoughts ahead of time so you can decide what you want to talk about
- Making a list of your symptoms or any problems you're having
- Taking a partner — you may feel more confident if someone close to you is with you
- Being open and sharing anything that may affect your health with your health care team, including your lifestyle, stress level, your emotional health and relationships and whether you smoke, drink or use illicit drugs.

Q: When should I have an osteoporosis test?

A: After discussing your individual concerns about osteoporosis with your health care professional and receiving a thorough medical examination, he or she will decide when and how often you should have a bone mineral density (BMD) test which:

- Measures bone strength
- Predicts if your bones are at risk for fracture
- Monitors the effects of treatment if the test is conducted at intervals of a year or more

- Predicts your future risk for osteoporosis
- Is painless and noninvasive

Q: What if I feel my health care is unsatisfactory?

A: Communication can sometimes break down. Before deciding to find another professional, try taking some steps to improve communication and your satisfaction by asking for more information; don't downplay your concerns, and offer to call again if he or she is too busy or you feel rushed.

Q: My periods are difficult. What can I do to ease PMS?

A: Hormonal changes before and during menstruation can cause a variety of uncomfortable symptoms. The timing, severity and consistency of uncomfortable symptoms are key to diagnosing premenstrual syndrome (PMS) — a condition that is associated with more than 150 symptoms that occur approximately 14 days prior to the start of your period and subside when your period begins or soon after. One helpful way to begin to manage your symptoms is to keep a record of when they occur, what they are and how severe or disruptive they are. This "premenstrual checklist" can help you know what to expect and the success of different relief strategies you use. Lifestyle changes, exercise, medication and calcium supplements may be recommended to ease some of your symptoms. Dietary changes such as decreasing the amount of refined sugar you eat, limiting beverages and food containing caffeine and nicotine, decreasing alcohol consumption, using less salt and avoiding sodas may also help. Ask your health care professional for more information.

Q: How do I know when I'm in menopause?

A: Menopause itself is one event — 12 consecutive months with no menstrual period and no other biological or physiological cause for the end of your periods. The time frame before menopause (which can be several years, is called perimenopause) and is the time when many (though not all) women experience some degree of menopausal symptoms.

For more information about women's health services at Mercy, visit www.mercysiouxcity.com .

HealthGrades ranks Mercy in the top 5% of the nation's hospitals for excellence in women's health.