



## your 20s and 30s

Like many women her age, **Dalia Concepcion, 27, of Port Chester, N.Y.**, is busy focusing on her career. In her free time, she and her husband enjoy traveling to exotic locales. "We live for traveling and dining out," says Concepcion, an actuary whose adventures have taken her to Australia, Brazil and Japan. At 5 feet 4 inches and 135 pounds, Concepcion admits she'd like to get into better shape but works out only on occasion because her evenings are often consumed with studying for exams to advance her career. "I probably don't exercise enough, but I'm not really concerned about it right now," she says. Concepcion eats a healthful diet, which includes oatmeal and yogurt for breakfast, and soup and salad for lunch. She gets an annual pelvic exam and Pap test, and keeps tabs on her cholesterol, which runs high in her family. She recently started taking prenatal vitamins as she hopes to get pregnant soon. Here's what Concepcion and other women in their 20s and 30s need to be doing now to improve and maintain health:

**Get revved.** High energy and metabolism make these the best years to take on high-intensity exercises for overall health, says Larysa DiDio, a personal trainer in Pleasantville, N.Y. Exercise can help you stave off high cholesterol, high blood pressure and weight gain—three risk factors for heart disease. Ideally, you should exercise six times a week for at least 30 minutes at a time, but whatever you can fit in is better than nothing. The activity should include a mix of cardio workouts and strength training. (For help sticking with your exercise plan, check out "Move It or Lose It," Page 6.)

**Eat right—now.** A healthful diet is essential to maintain your weight and prevent heart disease, the No. 1 killer of women. Aim for five to nine daily servings of fruits and

vegetables, says C. Noel Bairey Merz, M.D., medical director of the Preventive and Rehabilitative Cardiac Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Along with fruit, other good, nutrient-dense carbs include whole grains such as whole-wheat pasta, breads and cereals. Cut back on refined carbs such as bagels, muffins and cakes. And limit your intake of high-fat foods. For healthy teeth and bones, be sure to get 1,000 mg of calcium a day, along with 400 international units (IU) of vitamin D to ensure calcium absorption, either through supplements or fortified foods (such as low-fat milk).

**Ace your exams.** Now is the time to start getting Pap tests, clinical breast exams (CBEs) and pelvic exams. A CBE can help detect breast abnormalities, while a Pap test can help detect human papillomavirus (HPV), the leading cause of cervical cancer. Women should start having Pap tests three years after starting to have vaginal intercourse or at age 21, whichever is sooner. They should have Pap tests every other year. At age 30, women who have had three consecutive normal Pap test results may be screened every two to three years alone, or every three years along with an HPV test. Some women with certain risk factors may need to be tested yearly. Any woman who is sexually active should also be screened for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). STDs can occur in any sexually active woman, but chlamydia and gonorrhea are more common in women under the age of 25. If you have one or more sexual partners, make sure to get tested for these STDs. HIV testing is important too. Talk to your doctor about screenings. Unless you're in a committed, monogamous relationship, always use a condom, even if you're using another form of birth control. Condoms can help guard against STDs. (For more on sexual health, turn to "Let's Talk About Sex" on Page 18.)

**Do some pregnancy planning.** Most women this age are sexually active and need a reliable method of birth control, says Victoria Jennings, Ph.D., director of Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health. Talk with your doctor about your options. If you're starting to think about pregnancy, make sure you're taking a daily multivitamin that contains at