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Checking Up on Doctor's Visits

When is the last time you scheduled an appointment with your health care provider? During **National Women's Health Week** (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/>), the Office on Women's Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services challenges women to put their own health at the top of their to-do list — something that women tend to put last, after family, work, and other obligations. On **National Women's Checkup Day** (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/check-up-day/>), women are encouraged to pledge on that day to call their doctors to schedule physical exams and other health screenings.

Making the appointment is easy, but having a conversation with your doctor that really gives you the best information about how to keep yourself healthy can be tricky. The Office on Women's Health provides a handy **screening chart and immunization tool** (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/health-resources/screening-tool/>) that can get you started, but if you already struggle with heart disease and other health issues, that conversation can become even more difficult — especially when you have multiple health care providers.

"It is important that women with co-morbidities (i.e. heart disease and diabetes) have one primary physician who takes responsibility for coordinating her care," says Karol Watson, M.D., associate professor of medicine at UCLA and co-director of the UCLA Center for Cholesterol and Lipid Management. "This may be a cardiologist, if her primary problem is heart disease, or it may be her internist or primary care physician. But it is essential that someone be responsible."

Because physicians generally have a limited time to spend with patients, it's a good idea to arrive at your appointment armed with a list of questions as well as any new concerns that you have recently noticed. The American Heart Association provides a lengthy list of suggested **questions** (<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4678>) which can be a useful starting point — covering everything from "What are my options in controlling high blood pressure?" to "How long will the batteries last in my pacemaker?".

Being an informed patient is critical to your continued good health. "Every woman should "know their numbers"," advises Dr. Watson, who suggests that women should be getting blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose tests at their annual physical, and should be aware of both their weight and waist circumference.

If you've had a previous heart attack, take a pro-active stance with your health care provider and ask the questions that could save your life in the future. "All heart attack

survivors should know what to do if symptoms should recur, what they should be doing to reduce the risk of a second heart attack, and if any testing is needed,” says Dr. Watson, who reminds women that testing has to be individualized to each patient based on her own specific health history.

So pick up the phone and make that call — whether it’s on **National Women’s Checkup Day** or any other day, make a commitment to put your health first. Your family and friends will thank you for it!