

[IMAGE]

## Snapshot of the Healthy Woman

By Editorial Staff

We're not talking about appearance, although to a certain degree, how we look can provide clues to our overall health or individual aspects of it. We're talking about the factors that contribute to physical and functional health in women by the time they reach middle age. Let's take a snapshot of the healthy woman and see which physical and behavioral factors matter the most.

Researchers tracked nearly 2,000 women for more than two decades to determine which factors contributed to "clinically important improvements in health and function." Their findings: Better sleep, less financial strain, lower body mass index, fewer medications, better bone health (no osteoarthritis diagnosis), and higher physical activity scores correlated with improvements compared to women who did not achieve improvements.

What improvements in health and function? For the researchers, it meant improvements in the physical component score of the 36-item Short-Form Health Survey. To the layperson, the survey assesses physical function, role limitations due to physical health, bodily pain, general health perceptions, vitality, social functioning, role limitations due to emotional problems, and mental health. Higher scores, better health.

It's important that the researchers, whose findings appear in *JAMA Network Open*, studied women at midlife, since midlife is a period in which important changes in health and function can occur, particularly for women. In fact, as the researchers emphasize, health status at midlife can predict health in later life according to previous studies. Therefore, identifying which factors can improve health and function by midlife is critical.

healthy woman - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark While "less financial strain" is not necessarily under your control, all the other factors generally are – you can improve your sleep habits, lose weight if necessary, avoid medications whenever possible, optimize bone health (via diet and exercise) and exercise consistently. In other words, the snapshot of a healthy woman at midlife can and should be each and every woman!

If you're falling short relative to one or more of the above health factors, ask your doctor for help outlining a sensible strategy to improve your health. As you can see, by the time you reach midlife, you'll be happy you made changes for the better.

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