

## Prevention

# 11 Bad Habits You Can No Longer Get Away With In Your 40s

May 31, 2017 By [Kara Wahlgren](#)



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Sure, 40 is the new 30, but some days you might wonder if your body got the memo. While there are plenty of fabulous [things that happen when you turn 40](#), the trade-off is that you can't skate by health-wise like you could in your 20s and 30s: Your metabolism starts to slow down, your risk factors for certain conditions go up, and it becomes a whole lot harder to neglect your body and get away with it.

That doesn't mean you have to let middle age wreak havoc on your well-being, but you do have to be more careful about avoiding a few common mistakes. Here are a few bad habits to break so you can stay healthy in your 40s and beyond. (And while we're on the

topic of aging amazingly well, you have to check out our new book [Ageless Brain](#) —you'll see how simple it is to cut your risk of Alzheimer's in half, naturally. [Take a look!](#) )



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## Skipping strength training

There are plenty of reasons to love (or at least tolerate) cardio—it torches calories, improves endurance, and reduces your chances of [heart attack and stroke](#) —but make sure you're incorporating weights into your workouts, too. "We all begin to lose muscle mass around age 30, and this process accelerates at age 40," says Caroline Apovian, MD, director of the Nutrition and Weight Management Center at the Boston Medical Center.

The problem, she explains, is that muscle mass plays a big role in your basal metabolic rate—the amount of calories you burn at rest—so when you lose muscle mass, your metabolism slows down. (If you've noticed it's suddenly harder to lose weight, that could explain why.) Strength training twice a week (with these [5 essential movements](#) ) can help you rebuild muscle and [get your metabolism back up to speed](#) .



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## Giving in to sugar cravings

Think twice before polishing off that pint of ice cream or pitcher of sweet tea. Eating too much sugar can mess with your body's ability to process it, which can lead to insulin resistance, and, in turn type 2 diabetes. Since [type 2 diabetes](#) is most common in people over 40, it's smart to start cutting back on sugary snacks if you haven't already. The [American Heart Association](#) recommends keeping your sugar intake below 25 grams per day. (Here are a few other [reasons to eat less sugar](#) .)



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## Putting off mammograms

When you're in your 30s, your [risk of getting breast cancer](#) is 1 in 228. But after you turn 40, the odds jump to 1 in 69, so your doctor will likely recommend that you start getting squished. (Find out [what to expect from your first mammogram](#) .) [Sherry Ross](#) , MD, an ob-gyn at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, CA, advises that most women start mammograms at 40 and continue getting them annually or bi-annually, depending on your personal risk factors.



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## Letting a bad mood linger

**Depression** is more prevalent among women than men, and once you turn 40, you're also in the age group most likely to have [this condition](#) . But according to the CDC, only about 35% of people actually seek help for their symptoms. If you're dealing with sadness, irritability, guilt, or loss of interest in stuff you normally enjoy—and your symptoms stick around for more than two weeks—it may be more than just a bad mood. (Luckily, there are a number of natural remedies that may help you [manage your symptoms without medication](#) .) Talk to your doctor to see if you need treatment.



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## Burning the midnight oil

When your schedule is hectic (and is it ever not hectic?) you may have trouble powering down at the end of the day. You're not alone: According to the CDC, 1 in 3 Americans fall short of the recommended [7 hours of sleep a night](#) . And getting a good night's sleep becomes even harder once you hit 40.

"Shifting circadian rhythms, a natural decrease in melatonin, and the hormonal side effects of aging can all interfere with getting a good night's sleep," Apovian says. (Find out if taking [melatonin pills to help you sleep is safe](#) .) Stick to a consistent sleep schedule, limit your screen time before bed, and block out at least 7 hours each night for ZZZS.



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## Ghosting your gyno

At this age, you can typically go five years between [Pap tests](#) , as long as you've had normal results up until this point. But that doesn't mean you should skip you gyn visits altogether. You might still need yearly pelvic and breast exams, plus your annual checkup is a great chance to discuss any health issues or hormonal changes you've been experiencing. (Don't worry how crazy your symptoms sound— [we guarantee that your gyno has seen crazier](#) .)



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## Forgetting your SPF

[Sunburn](#) , like a keg stand, is a rite of passage that needs to be left in the distant past. Getting burned is a bad idea at any age, but as you get older, it's even more crucial to protect your skin from damage. "Women over 40 should be applying a facial moisturizer with sunscreen in it every morning," says Robin Evans, MD, of [Southern CT Dermatology](#) . And if you've never had a baseline skin exam, schedule an appointment with a derm ASAP—and be sure to check your skin yourself each month for any moles that change in shape, size, or color. (Take a look at these [5 skin cancer warning signs that are easy to overlook](#) .)



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## Overlooking eye exams

If you still have perfect vision or your prescription hasn't changed in the past few years, you may not see any reason to rush to the eye doctor. (Just make sure you're [not ignoring one of these 5 eye symptoms](#), from *Prevention* Premium.) But after you turn 40, you're more likely to experience eye problems that can lead to vision issues, like glaucoma. "Women should start getting comprehensive eye exams once they turn 40, because early signs of [vision problems and eye conditions](#) can begin at this age, and the risk increases with each decade afterwards," says Elizabeth Yeu, MD, an ophthalmologist in Norfolk, VA.



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## Slacking on dental care

Most of us occasionally doze off without brushing or fib to the dentist about how often we floss. But as you get older, [taking care of your teeth](#) can stave off some serious health issues. For starters, you'll be less likely to lose some of those [pearly whites](#) . "Your oral health is also directly connected with your overall health, and is absolutely necessary for keeping gum disease, heart disease, and diabetes at a distance," says [Gary Glassman](#) , DDS, a Toronto-based dentist and endodontist. (Be sure to avoid these [6 mistakes you make every time you brush your teeth.](#))



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## Not getting the vitamins you need

"At menopause, decreased estrogen leads to a [rapid loss of bone density](#)," says Alexis Melnick, MD, an assistant attending ob-gyn and reproductive medicine physician at New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical College. "Maintaining adequate bone density prior to menopause is crucial for prevention of osteoporosis." In other words, now is the perfect time to make sure you're getting enough calcium and [vitamin D](#) — either through your diet or supplements—to support bone health down the road. (Also try these [4 exercises that help strengthen your bones](#) .)



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## Putting everyone else first

In your 20s and 30s when you're building a career or starting a family (or both!), it's easy to put your health on the back burner while you juggle everything else. But make this the year you start taking care of yourself as much as you take care of others. "Start a new mindset, and think of yourself as a priority," says Anne Davis, MD, an ob-gyn at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University Medical Center. Schedule an annual checkup with your primary care physician. Find time to exercise. Make sure you're getting any screenings and blood work you need. (These are the [9 most important medical tests for women](#).) It's easy to put those things off, but preventive care can help you stay healthy for the decades to come.

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