

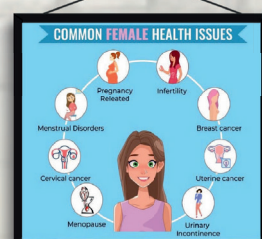


सत्यमेव जयते  
ग्रामीण विकास मंत्रालय  
भारत सरकार



# WOMEN HEALTH PROBLEMS

## Facilitator Guide for SHG Meetings



**Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)**

Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India



## Dear Facilitator

This facilitator guide on **“Women Health Problems”**, is designed to help all facilitators under State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) in rolling out the Flipbook and disseminating key messages within the SHG groups and other community cadres. This session is part of a training package on Food, Nutrition, Health, and WASH (FNHW) consisting of Flipbooks, Facilitator guides, Posters, Counselling Cards, and Stickers.

The objective of this training is to gain knowledge on women’s health issues and to address appropriate healthcare practices for their prevention and cure. This knowledge will consequently help to adopt better behavior and practices that will improve the overall health of women at the right time. We all know that better health and nutrition result in higher productivity leading to a reduction in poverty and an improvement in quality of life.

It should be kept in mind that this orientation package, although meant for SHG women, should serve as reference material for the entire family. Information provided under each session through flipbooks and this guide should be seen as collective learning for the family, and each member of the family needs to play their part to ensure that the messages are adopted by them in everyday lives.

The responsibility of getting these behaviors imbibed does not lie with women only; the men/husbands/older boys in the family need to ensure making arrangements for whatever is required to deal with these health issues faced by women.

### Objectives

After going through the module, the facilitator will be able to:

- Discuss and explain the common health issues which affect women in general, during different stages of life.
- Explain the symptoms, causes and what to do if the any participant, their family member or others suffer from such health issues.
- Understand the role of family members in creating an enabling environment for a supportive health care system for their women and adolescent girls at home.

### Initiate the session with discussions on the following points with the group

- Adolescents’ girls and boys should be introduced to good healthcare & self-care practices. Women, irrespective of rural and urban background generally ignore their personal health in the midst of their concern for their families.



- A healthy girl or a woman at home is an asset to the family, community, and to nation and thus their health should not be ignored.
- Women and girls may be hesitant in reporting or discussing certain health problems they may be facing, thus the environment in the household should be conducive for such discussions. Men and older boys in the household should therefore, also be made aware of these issues.

It is very important that in this session facilitators do not allow the participants to perpetuate negative cultural taboos and myths. More importantly, ensure that participants truly understand, with cultural and gender sensitivity, the need for nutrition and health care to prevent and cure the common health issues faced by adolescent girls and women, and how to handle these health issues.

The majority of the health issues discussed here are specific to adolescent girls and women in the family where timely diagnosis and treatment is very crucial. These issues are menstrual hygiene and related problems, menopause, white discharge, Uterine prolapse, sexually transmitted diseases, infertility, breast and cervical cancers. We now know from research studies and experiences of projects in our country and from other countries that the burden of women's health issues can be reduced through effective diagnosis and preventive measures. The response of our health system is not just to identify and treat these diseases, but also address timely diagnosis, prevention, and health promotion.

### Case Study

**Seema** is 48 years old and is a farm worker, she does heavy physical activity which doesn't give her sufficient time for herself. Since few months she has been undergoing a few common symptoms like vasomotor symptoms, symptoms affecting bones and joints, depressive mood, urinary tract problems, and vaginal dryness. She realized that she has been losing her temper with her family members for very small issues and had anxiety and mood swings very frequently.

When she heard at the Anganwadi Centre that there is a medical camp being arranged in her village and a lady doctor will be visiting for consultation, especially for women, she decided to meet this doctor. Seema managed to complete her work before time and went to the camp to meet the doctor.

- ▶ What are the Doctors' observations about Seema's health status?
- ▶ What could be the linking factors for her mood swings, anxiety and depression?
- ▶ What should be done to help Seema to understand and overcome her health issues status?

**Note:** Do not give any answers here, just listen to what the group has to say.



## Step 1: Setting the Context

Ask the group on what they think about the bodily changes during adolescence in girls as well as in boys and what are the major changes witnessed during this phase. Also ask the group if they are aware of the physical and emotional changes during this period that should not be ignored.

With the help of Flipbook, elaborate on common physical changes and other health issues that may be encountered by adolescent girls and boys. Knowledge of these issues will help the facilitators to take appropriate steps and answer the queries posed by participants.

The period of transition from childhood to adulthood is called adolescence with accelerated physical, biochemical and emotional development. Individuals between the age group of 10 to 19 years are considered adolescents. There are many physical and mental changes that result due to the influences of hormones. It is during this period final growth spurt occurs with an increase in height and weight. The growth spurt of boys is slower than that of girls. Growth velocity is maximum for boys between 12–15 years and for girls 10–13 years.

With the profound growth of adolescents, there is an increased demand for energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins. Thus, paying attention to good nutrition along with several other factors is very important. Malnutrition also leads to delay in menarche (beginning of menstruation).

The nutritional and health concerns of adolescents have largely been neglected. They constitute one of the nutritionally vulnerable groups who have not received the attention they deserved. Only a healthy adolescent girl can become a healthy mother who in turn can give birth to a healthy child.

Inform the group that girls and boys at this time should be approached sensitively as they go through a lot of mood swings or may be shy and will not easily talk about the changes. Parents should inform and prepare their children beforehand so that they know what to expect.

### Know about bodily changes in girls during adolescence

Between the age of 10 to 19 years, a girl's body changes drastically. There are physical as well as emotional changes.

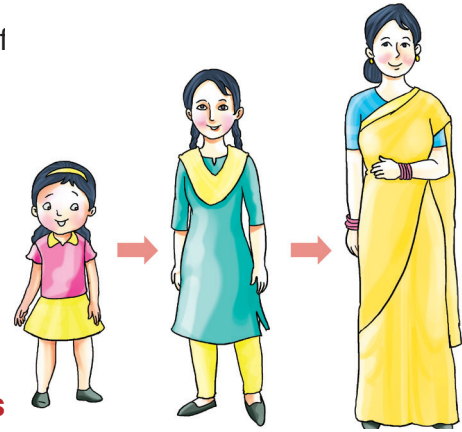
#### Changes in the body:

Her body size will increase, with the feet, arms, legs, and hands beginning to grow in advance of the body. This may cause a girl to feel clumsy. As puberty hormones increase, teens may have an increase in oily skin and sweating.



In girls, sexual development starts between the ages of

- There is an increase in the rate of growth of height.
- The size of the uterus and vagina increases.
- There is an increase in the size of the breast
- Pubic hair begins to appear.
- Menstruation starts.



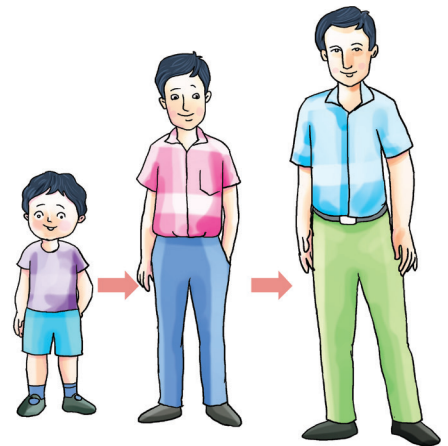
### Know about bodily changes in girls during adoles

Between the age of 10 to 19 years, boys also undergo bodily and emotional changes, that need to be handled sensitively.

Boys show the first physical changes of puberty between the ages of 10 to 16 years.

#### Changes in the body:

- The size of the penis and testicles increase.
- Pubic hair appears, followed by underarm and facial hair.
- The voice deepens and may sometimes crack or break.
- The larynx cartilage or Adam's apple gets bigger.
- Testicles begin to produce sperm.




Parents should discuss and inform their adolescent children of these changes, that they are normal and that it is their transition to adulthood. Some adolescents, in this age tend to become very introvert, shy and conscious of themselves, they should be spoken to more frequently so that they come out of this shell.

## Step 2: Need for health and nutrition care during adolescence

Now, ask the participants on why do we need to pay more attention on the nutrition and health of adolescents and what practices should be adopted to improve their nutrition, health and wellness.

There are 253 million adolescents in the age group 10–19 years in India. This age group comprises of individuals in a transient phase of life requiring nutrition, education, counselling and guidance to ensure their development into healthy adults. They are susceptible to several preventable and treatable health and behavioural issues, like early & unintended pregnancy, unsafe sex leading to STI/HIV/AIDS, nutritional disorders like malnutrition, overweight, alcoholism, drug abuse and mental health disorders.



Government of India has recognized the importance of influencing health-seeking behaviour of adolescents. The health situation of this age group is a key determinant of India's overall health, mortality, morbidity and population growth scenario. Therefore, investments in adolescent reproductive and sexual health will yield dividends in terms of delaying age at marriage, reducing incidence of teenage pregnancy, meeting unmet contraception need, reducing the maternal mortality, reducing STI incidence and reducing HIV prevalence. It will also help India realize its demographic dividends, as healthy adolescents are an important resource for the economy. Adolescence offers a second chance to avert negative impacts of malnutrition that may have occurred during childhood.

**It is thus understood that the adolescent stage is important to:**

- Meet physical and cognitive growth demands.
- Nurture good lifestyle habits.
- Prevent adult onset of illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, etc.

**Inappropriate diet and health care during adolescence may lead to**

- Retarded physical growth, delayed sexual maturation.
- Lack of concentration, poor school performance slow learning.
- Deficiencies and disorders such as anemia, undernutrition, obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, etc.

### **Step 3: Health related issues for Adolescent Girls and women**

In the sections that follow we will focus on certain health issues faced by women. This guide and the associated flipbook will not deal with health issues of men.

The issues discussed here are menstruation related, white discharge, sexually transmitted and reproductive tract infections, uterine prolapse, urinary tract infections, infertility, breast cancer and cervical cancer.

#### **i. Menstruation related Problems and what to do?.**

Make the participants understand that menstrual problems are normal and that there is no need to panic. Make the participants aware of premenstrual syndrome and the symptoms associated with this. Inform the group that if some symptoms persist for a long time with pain, discomfort, and abnormal menstrual flow, then it may be something of concern, and a doctor should be consulted.



### **Premenstrual Syndrome:**

This is not so uncommon in adolescence and is characterized by physical and psychological symptoms which occur 7–10 days prior to the onset of periods and disappear within the first or two of menstrual flow. These include weight gain, abdominal bloating, breast engorgement, pain, constipation, peripheral oedema, headache, irritability, anxiety, depression, tension, fatigue, lack of concentration, increased appetite, and cravings for sweet and salty foods. Management includes reassurance, exercise, and dietary modification to meet all the nutritional requirements.

**The facilitators are requested to go through materials on “Menstrual Hygiene and related issues” From the FNHW toolkit for more details on this issue.**

**Problems during menstruation are very common, especially among girls and young unmarried women.**

### **Pain and discomfort**

- Dysmenorrhea refers to painful cramps during menstruation. Severe pain in the lower abdomen, hips, and back and may be accompanied by dizziness or nausea.
- Breast tenderness
- Bloating, vomiting, and a feeling of tenseness
- Weight gain up to 1 Kg about 7–10 days before the next period due to water retention in the body.
- Emotional stress often contributes to the symptoms.

### **Lack of menstrual flow**

- This can be a normal occurrence or a sign of malfunction or disease.
- If menstruation is normal and stops for 6 or more months, it may be due to pregnancy, breastfeeding or menopause.
- It is best to consult a doctor or healthworker for advice

### **What to do at home?**

- Hot water bath helps to relieve the pain.
- Use hot water bottle for relief
- Consume nutritious food
- If pain is unbearable, painkillers may be taken after consultation with a health worker.
- Consult a doctor if menstruation does not start till age 16 years or if normal menstruation stops for reasons other than pregnancy or menopause.

### Myths & Facts during their Menstrual Cycle:

Many people seem to believe these myths during their menstrual cycle, yet there is not scientific proof that-

- **Sour foods are harmful to women's health**-No Scientific Evidence
- **Physical activity causes more pain or dysmenorrhoea**-Light  
Exercise can help to relieve menstruating women with symptoms of premenstrual syndrome and dysmenorrhea and relieve bloating. Exercise also causes a release of serotonin, making one feel much happier.
- **Majority of the women prefer old used cloth which is often reused**-  
This increases the susceptibility to infection.
- **Not bathing during menstruation** - Can lead to compromise in hygiene of the girl and thus lead to the reproductive tract infections.

**Data Resource:** [doi:10.4103/2249-4863.154627](https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.154627)

### ii. White discharge

Ask the participants on what changes are observed during menstruation, what are the causes, and how to prevent them.

#### Vaginal yeast infections - (White Discharge)

Thick, white discharge is a normal part of the menstrual cycle. In most cases, **it is the result of the vagina cleaning itself to prevent infection.** Vaginal discharge is completely natural. Its color, texture, and amount can differ, depending on your age and where you are in your menstrual cycle. However, a person should take note of changes in the consistency, smell, and color of their discharge, as such changes could indicate an infection.

It happens when a specific fungus (candida) grows out of control in the vagina. It produces a thick, white, cottage cheese-like vaginal discharge. Your vagina may swell and be itchy, and sex may be painful at this time. Antifungal medications treat a yeast infection. A white, odorless discharge from the vagina is normal during pregnancy and in girls who have just started menstruating.

**Data Resource:** <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK543220/>





## What is normal?

- Normal vaginal discharge ranges in color from clear or milky to white.
- The consistency of vaginal discharge also varies from thin and watery to thick and sticky.
- Generally, healthy vaginal discharge should be relatively odourless.

## There is an infection if –

- there is a yellowish, green, or fish-like smelly discharge
- There is Intense itching of the vulva
- There is Vaginal bleeding between two menstrual cycles there is severe pain in the abdomen or back

## Causes of infection:


- **Sexually transmitted** – Bacterial Vaginosis (BV) occurs when there's too much of a certain bacterium in your vagina. It can be transmitted through sexual contact but not always. People with BV have white or grey discharge that's foul-smelling and fishy. It's treated with antibiotics.
- **Poor hygiene** – Vaginitis is any inflammation or infection of the vagina. It is common in women of all ages. **Causes can include infections, hormone changes, and poor personal hygiene.** Symptoms can include pain, itching, burning, sores, and vaginal discharge.
- **Use of the same pad or tampon for a long duration** – In general, if you leave a tampon in for too long it can create a breeding ground for bacteria and can increase the risk of yeast infections, and bacterial vaginosis.
- **Antibiotic and steroid use, birth control pills, and pregnancy** – can all increase your risk of this common infection

## What to do?

- Talk to a health care worker/doctor as soon as possible.
- Avoid sexual contact with anyone till fully treated.
- Both husband and wife must receive full treatment
- Clean your genital area properly
- Change pads every 3-4 hours during heavy flow

## Home remedies via foods:

- **Consuming fenugreek seeds boiled in water** can reduce the problem of white discharge. You can boil fenugreek seeds in 500 ml of water until the water is reduced to half. Then drink this water when it cools down

- 
- **You can drink rice starch** (water in which rice is boiled) regularly to reduce the problem of white discharge
  - **Other most common foods** used are Natural Yogurt, and citrus fruits like amla, and lemon.

**Data Source:** <https://ejournal.lucp.net/index.php/mjn/article/view/484>.

### **iii. Sexually Transmitted Diseases/Reproductive Tract Infections**

Now, ask the participants if they are aware of the infections that are transmitted sexually and about the reproductive tract infections.

**These are infections that affect the reproductive system. They may spread during sexual intercourse or by other means.**

**Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)** – or sexually transmitted infections (STIs) – are generally acquired by sexual contact. The bacteria, viruses or parasites that cause sexually transmitted diseases may pass from person to person in blood, semen, or vaginal and other bodily fluids. Sometimes these infections can be transmitted non sexually, such as from mothers to their infants during pregnancy or childbirth, or through blood transfusions or shared needles.

STIs don't always cause symptoms. It's possible to contract sexually transmitted infections from people who seem perfectly healthy and may not even know they have an infection.

#### **Symptoms**

STDs or STIs can have a range of signs and symptoms, including no symptoms. That's why they may go unnoticed until complications occur, or a partner is diagnosed. Signs and symptoms that might indicate an STI include:

- Sores or bumps on the genitals or in the oral or rectal area
- Painful or burning urination
- Discharge from the penis
- Unusual or odorous vaginal discharge
- Unusual vaginal bleeding
- Pain during sex
- Sore, swollen lymph nodes, particularly in the groin but sometimes more widespread



- Lower abdominal pain
- Fever
- Rash over the trunk, hands or feet

Signs and symptoms may appear a few days after exposure. However, it may take a lot more time before you have any noticeable problems, depending on the organism causing the STI.

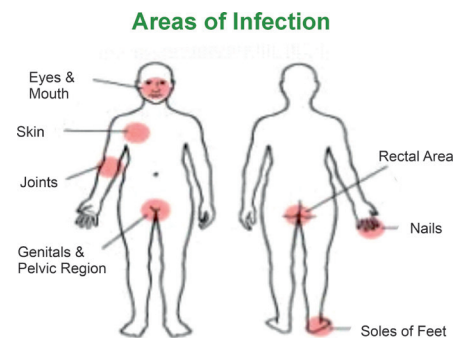
### When to see a doctor

See a doctor immediately if:

- You are sexually active and may have been exposed to an STI
- You have signs and symptoms of an STI

### The most common symptoms of STI/RTI are:

- Abnormal discharge or genital sores or swelling.
- Sores may also occur in the eyes, mouth, skin, joints, soles of feet, and skin of palms
- RTIs may lead to serious complications—especially in women—if they are left untreated.
- RTIs increase the risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.



**Remember: *many women and men who have an RTI, do not experience any symptoms at all.***

### What to do?

- Talk to a health care worker or Doctor as soon as possible.
- Avoid sexual contact with anyone till fully treated.
- Both husband and wife must receive full treatment

#### iv. Uterine prolapse

Ask the participants about their knowledge, and experience in detecting the symptoms, causes and methods to treat uterine prolapse.

**Uterine prolapse** – occurs when pelvic floor muscles and ligaments stretch and weaken until they no longer provide enough support for the uterus. As a result, the uterus slips down into or protrudes out of the vaginal canal. Uterine prolapse most often affects people after menopause who have had one or more vaginal deliveries.

##### **What causes Uterine prolapse?**

Uterine prolapse results from the weakening of pelvic muscles and supportive tissues. Causes of weakened pelvic muscles and tissues include:

- Vaginal delivery
- Age at first delivery (older women are at higher risk of pelvic floor injuries compared with younger women)
- Difficult labour and delivery or trauma during childbirth-It may also occur in the early twenties among chronically malnourished women who perform heavy manual labour soon after their first or second deliveries.
- Delivery of a large baby-baby being overweight
- Frequent childbearing are also reasons that the uterus could prolapse.
- Lower oestrogen level after menopause- This happens to older, post-menopausal women because of the weakening of the muscles and ligaments
- Chronic constipation or straining with bowel movements
- Prolapse may also be caused by violence against women
- Following surgery, or trauma to the pelvic floor.
- Chronic cough or bronchitis
- Repeated heavy lifting

##### **Symptoms**

- Difficulty in standing and sitting due to an obstructed and blocked feeling,
- obstruction while passing urine and motion
- back ache, lower abdominal pain, profuse and smelly or itchy white discharge
- Urinary tract infection



## What to do?

Surgery may be needed to repair uterine prolapse. Minimally invasive surgery called laparoscopic surgery, or vaginal surgery might be an option.

- Consult a doctor to learn pelvic exercises.
- Use contraceptives to avoid frequent pregnancies.
- Rest for at least 6 weeks after delivery, avoid lifting heavy weights.
- In case of severe prolapse, surgical intervention may be needed.

## To reduce the risk of uterine, prolapse, try to:

- **Prevent constipation.** Drink plenty of fluids and eat high-fiber foods, such as fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains.
- **Avoid heavy lifting.** If you have to lift something heavy, do it correctly. Correct lifting uses the legs instead of the waist or back.
- **Control coughing.** Get treatment for a chronic cough or bronchitis. Do not smoke.
- **Avoid weight gain.** Talk with your doctor about your ideal weight and get advice on how to lose weight, if you need to.

## v. Urinary Tract Infection

Now, ask the participants on why, how, and when we need to pay more attention on the Urinary Tract health during adolescence and later and what practices should be adopted to prevent UTIs.

Infections in the organs that produce and store urine in the body are called Urinary Tract Infections.


UTI typically occurs when bacteria enter the urinary tract through the urethra and begin to spread in the bladder. The urinary system is designed to keep out bacteria. But the defences sometimes fail. When that happens, bacteria may take hold and grow into a full-blown infection in the urinary tract.

UTI is common in women in the reproductive age and post-menopausal stage. Pregnant women and newly married women in the age group of 21-30 years are more prone to UTIs. Diabetic Mellitus prevalent in post-menopausal women has a link with UTI incidence.

## Why it happens:

- Retention of urine for too long: Women in areas without toilets suffer from UTIs more frequently because they have to hold on to a full bladder for long duration.



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- Drinking very less water.
  - Poor Personal Hygiene.
  - Injury to the urinary tract during sexual intercourse or during a medical procedure.

#### **What to do –**

- Keep drinking water continuously – Drink at least 8 glasses of water in the day, preferably warm.
- Hot water massage if there is too much pain.
- Drink cooking soda solution – Add a teaspoon of cooking soda in a glass of water or a glass of fruit juice and drink it.
- If necessary, pain killers can be taken.
- Lie down and take rest.

#### **Symptoms:**

- Burning sensation and pain while passing urine.
- Feel like urinating constantly, but the flow of urine is limited. Urine is passed minimally, in drops.
- An uncontrollable feeling to pass urine urgently.
- Sometimes this may be accompanied by fever, pain in the lower abdomen or lower back.
- The urine appears cloudy.
- At times urine may appear bloody.

#### **When to consult a Doctor?**

- If UTI continues for more than a day.
- If you are pregnant.
- If blood is passed mixed in urine.
- Men and children get UTI rarely. In case of infection, they should be taken to the doctor immediately.



### Keep in mind the following points to prevent Urinary Tract Infection.

**Wipe front to back:** Since the rectum is a main source of E.coli, it's best to wipe your genitals from front to back after using the bathroom. This habit decreases the risk of bringing E.coli from the anus to the urethra. It's even more important to do this if you have diarrhoea. Having diarrhoea can make it hard to control bowel movements, which may increase the chance of E.coli spreading to the urethra.

## vi. Infertility

Initiate the next topic by asking the participants about their understanding on infertility and related issues. List the concerns and probe with the group about what they think should be done and how to handle this sensitive issue.

### Explain to them the following points -

Infertility is the condition when pregnancy does not take place for a couple even after 2 years of trying. If a woman keeps having miscarriages, it is also called infertility. The main symptom of infertility is the inability to get pregnant. A menstrual cycle that's too long (35 days or more), too short (less than 21 days), irregular or absent can mean that you're not ovulating. There might be no other signs or symptoms. It affects men and women equally.

But, in our society, men are reluctant to go for testing and the woman is blamed and suffers emotional trauma within the family because of this.

**Causes:** Female infertility can result from age, physical problems, hormone problems, and lifestyle or environmental factors.

- Scarring from surgery
- Cervical mucus problems
- Fibroids.
- Endometriosis.
- Tubal Blockages
- Poor Egg condition
- PCOS- polycystic ovarian syndrome
- Ovulations problems

- Pelvic inflammatory disease.
- Sterilisation.
- Medicines and drugs.

**Treatment:** Fertility drugs are the main treatment for women who are infertile due to ovulation disorders. Fertility drugs generally work like natural hormones – Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH) – to trigger ovulation.

### What to do?

- Infertility is often curable
- Consult a qualified Doctor

Both women and men should get investigated and treated

### Causes of female infertility

- **Difficulty in ovulation** - release of eggs from the ovaries sometimes due to Poly Cystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD)
- **Uterine or cervical abnormalities**
- **Fallopian tube damage or blockage** - Due to inflammation of the fallopian tube due to a sexually transmitted infection, Tuberculosis or other diseases.
- **Early menopause**

### Myths around Infertility

Some of the most common myths surrounding infertility-

**Myth: Infertility is a woman's problem**

**Reality:** Male and female infertility are equally prevalent among couples. There is an infertility issue in the male partner in about one-third of the cases, another one-third in the female partner and the remaining is often a combination of both.



***Myth: Being on birth control pills for a prolonged period leads to infertility***

**Reality:** Oral contraceptive pills are usually well tolerated and don't result in infertility. Couples should wait for 2-3 months after stopping the pill so that the effect of the pill wears off completely and they plan a pregnancy. Other intra-uterine devices like Copper-T may sometimes cause infections or swelling in the uterus, but this is temporary and has no links with infertility.

***Myth: Age impacts fertility of women, not men***

**Reality:** Though the effect of aging is seen more in women, where there is a drop in ovarian reserves with progressing age; it is definitely a factor for men too. Older men are more prone to medical conditions like hypertension, diabetes, high-stress levels, obesity, much more than older women. All of these factors decrease the function of the sperm even in young men.

***Myth: Infertility is rare and impacts only a very small section of the Indian population***

**Reality:** It is a growing problem in India and an increasing number of men and women are affected by infertility due to a variety of reasons. This includes late marriages, delayed pregnancy owing to focus on career, lifestyle problems like smoking, alcohol and obesity. The chances of a healthy young woman to get pregnant are only 10 per cent per cycle, which reduces to just 2 per cent after the age of 40.

***Myth: It is impossible for women to get pregnant after 38-40 years of age***

**Reality:** We have experienced healthy deliveries even at the age of 43 with some medical treatments. But in the Indian context, women start their menses late and hit menopause earlier than their western counterparts. This is often attributed to diet and lifestyle, which affects the ovarian reserves. While pregnancy is possible even up to 46 years of age, doctors need to judge the effect of ageing on ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus and sperms.



## vii. Menopause

Now, initiate a discussion on what the group members understand by menopause. If there are older (around 45+) women in the group, ask them if they have started experiencing any signs of menopause. Explain to the group members the following.

### **What is Menopause and what are the problems women face during menopause?**

Menopause is the time that marks the end of your menstrual cycles. It's diagnosed after you've gone 12 months without a menstrual period. Menopause can happen in your 40s or 50s. Menopause is a natural biological process. But the physical symptoms, such as hot flashes, and emotional symptoms of menopause may disrupt your sleep, lower your energy or affect emotional health. There are many effective treatments available, from lifestyle adjustments to hormone therapy. Signs and symptoms, including changes in menstruation can vary among women. Most likely, you'll experience some irregularity in your periods before they end.

Skipping periods during perimenopause is common and expected. Often, menstrual periods will skip a month and return, or skip several months and then start monthly cycles again for a few months. Periods also tend to happen on shorter cycles, so they are closer together. Despite irregular periods, pregnancy is possible. If you've skipped a period but aren't sure you've started the menopausal transition, consider a pregnancy test.

Preventive health care as you age may include recommended health screening tests, such as colonoscopy, mammography, and triglyceride screening. Your doctor might recommend other tests and exams, too, including thyroid testing if suggested by your history, and breast and pelvic exams. Always seek medical advice if you have bleeding from your vagina after menopause.

### **Why does this happen?**

After a certain age women's ovaries stop the production of eggs and there is a lack of hormone "estrogen" in the body and we experience symptoms of menopause.

### **What are the symptoms/discomfort women feel due to menopause?**

- Irregular periods.
- Hot flushes.





- Disturbance in sleep.
- Weight gain.
- Hair loss.
- Vaginal dryness.
- Mood swings.
- Changes in the skin like dry, patchy skin.

### **What can be done to get over these problems?**

There are usually no medicines prescribed for cure for these symptoms and problems. A few lifestyle changes can help the women feel better and most symptoms improve with time.

#### **Balanced diet**

- Maintaining a balance in your daily diet is very important during/after menopause.
- Include at least five food groups in the day's diet and eat more fiber-rich food. It.
- is better to minimize processed and canned food.

#### **Calcium supplementation**

- After menopause, your bones become weak due to a lack of estrogen, and
- the body needs more calcium, which in some cases one does not get enough.
- calcium from regular diet. Calcium tablets can be taken with the advice of a doctor.

#### **Regular exercise**

You may gain weight if you do not exercise during/after menopause. It is prescribed that one does light exercise or walks regularly for at least 30–40 minutes a day. This has a beneficial effect on your bones, muscles and joints.

The Family should be understanding and sensitive to the needs of the woman undergoing menopause since there are mood swings along with other symptoms and the family members should be comforting.



## viii. Breast cancer

Initiate the discussion with questions to the participants on what breast cancer is and brainstorm their understanding of this issue. The facilitator needs to be very careful in spreading scientific information on the disease and what should be done when early diagnosed.

Breast Cancer is the most common form of malignancy among women and cannot be prevented. Current trends point out that a higher proportion of the disease is occurring at a younger age in Indian women, as compared to the West. Doctors know that breast cancer occurs when some breast cells begin to grow abnormally. These cells divide more rapidly than healthy cells do and continue to accumulate, forming a lump or mass. Cells may spread (metastasize) through your breast to your lymph nodes or to other parts of your body. Breast cancer most often begins with cells in the milk-producing ducts (invasive ductal carcinoma). Breast cancer may also begin in the glandular tissue called lobules (invasive lobular carcinoma) or in other cells or tissue within the breast. There is a good chance of recovery if it is detected at an early stage. In India, cultural values and stigma are identified as key barriers to early detection and treatment.

### **Signs and symptoms of breast cancer may include:**

- A breast lump or thickening that feels different from the surrounding tissue
- Change in the size, shape or appearance of a breast
- Changes to the skin over the breast, such as dimpling
- A newly inverted nipple
- Peeling, scaling, crusting or flaking of the pigmented area of skin surrounding the nipple (areola) or breast skin
- Redness or pitting of the skin over your breast, like the skin of an orange

### **Causes**

Researchers have identified hormonal, lifestyle and environmental factors that may increase your risk of breast cancer. But it's not clear why some people who have no risk factors develop cancer, yet other people with risk factors never do. It's likely that breast cancer is caused by a complex interaction of your genetic makeup and your environment.



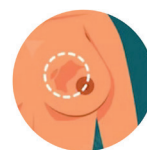
### When to see a doctor

If you find a lump or other change in your breast — even if a recent mammogram was normal — make an appointment with your doctor for prompt evaluation.

- Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in India
- Cancer is not caused by a virus or bacteria.
- If left untreated cancer spreads to other areas of the body.
- It can affect women of any age
- It can affect women of any breast shape or size
- Breast cancer is malignant abnormal cell growth in the breast.

### Signs and Symptoms

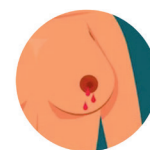
- Breast skin irritation
- Breast or Nipple pain, or inversion (turning inward)
- Abnormal discharge from the nipple
- Lump or mass in the breast.
- Dimpling of the breast
- Lump in the underarm
- Change in breast size



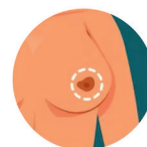
Breast skin irritation



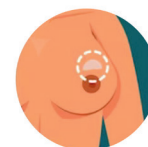
Breast or Nipple pain



Bloody Discharge



Nipple Deformation



a lump on the breast



Change of Breast size

### Risk Factors

Most women who develop breast cancer have no identifiable risk factors.

#### Risk factors are:

- **Gender** – Women are much more likely than men to develop breast cancer.
- **Increasing age.** The risk of breast cancer increases as age progress.
- **Personal history of breast cancer.** If you had breast cancer in one breast, you have an increased risk of developing cancer in the other breast.
- **Family history of breast cancer.** If your mother, sister or daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer, particularly at a young age, your risk of breast cancer is increased. Still, the majority of people diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease.
- **Obesity.** Being obese increases your risk of breast cancer.

- 
- **Beginning menstruation at a younger age.** Beginning your period before age 12 increases your risk of breast cancer.
  - **Menopause at an older age.** If you began menopause at an older age, you're more likely to develop breast cancer.
  - **Having first child at an older age.** Women who give birth to their first child after age 30 may have an increased risk of breast cancer.
  - **Never been pregnant.** Women who have never been pregnant have a greater risk of breast cancer than do women who have had one or more pregnancies.
  - **Postmenopausal hormone therapy.** Women who take hormone therapy medications that combine estrogen and progesterone to treat the signs and symptoms of menopause have an increased risk of breast cancer. The risk of breast cancer decreases when women stop taking these medications.
  - **Alcohol consumption.** Drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer.

#### **Prevention:**

- **Ask your doctor about breast cancer screening.** Discuss with your doctor when to begin breast cancer screening exams and tests, such as clinical breast exams and mammograms.
- **Talk to a doctor about the benefits and risks of screening.** Together, you can decide what breast cancer screening strategies are right for you.
- **Become familiar with your breasts through breast self-exam for breast awareness.** Women may choose to become familiar with their breasts by occasionally inspecting their breasts during a breast self-exam for breast awareness. If there is a new change, lumps or other unusual signs in your breasts, talk to your doctor promptly.

Breast awareness can't prevent breast cancer, but it may help you to better understand the normal changes that your breasts undergo and identify any unusual signs and symptoms.

- **Exercise, Physical activity, and household work.** Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise every day. If you have been active with household work and physical activity in girls will reduce the risks of breast cancer in later years.
- **Limit postmenopausal hormone therapy.** Combination hormone therapy may increase the risk of breast cancer. Some women experience bothersome signs and symptoms during menopause and, for these women, the increased risk of breast cancer may be acceptable in order to relieve menopause signs and symptoms. To reduce the risk of breast cancer, use the lowest dose of hormone therapy possible for the shortest amount of time.



- **Maintain a healthy weight.** It is advisable to keep optimum body weight and if one is overweight, efforts should be made to reduce weight or consult a doctor about healthy strategies to accomplish this. Reduce the number of calories you eat each day and slowly increase the amount of exercise.
- **Choose a healthy and balanced diet.** Maintaining a balance in your daily diet is very important for healthy life. Include at least five food groups in the day's diet and eat more fiber-rich food. Incorporate healthy oils for cooking and add seasonal fruits and vegetables to your diet. It is better to minimize processed and canned food.

### **ix. Breast self-examination & Steps for diagnosis of breast cancer**

While discussing, try to enlist the steps to self-examine, diagnosis, and treat, breast cancer among women. The participants who are cancer survivors if any may be asked to share their personal experiences, only if they are comfortable in doing so. Care must be taken that these could be sensitive issues and therefore these questions should be carefully handled.



Play the video to make them understand and aware of breast cancer.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNnRoOFsH4c>

**Breast self-examination can help identify signs of breast cancer early. All women should do self-examination once a month**

**Step 1:** Examine your breasts in the mirror. Keep the shoulders straight with arms on the hips. If you notice any swelling, dimpling, soreness, rash, puckering, unusual shape, and colour then report it to the doctor.

**Step 2:** Raise your arms and look for unusual changes like tenderness, redness, or pain in the breasts.

**Step 3:** Press breast and nipple to see if there is any discharge.

**Step 4:** Lie down and examine your left breast with your right hand and vice versa. For breast, examination use flat palm and finger pads and go firmly in circular motion. Cover the whole breast right from the collarbone to the top of the stomach. Do not forget the armpit and cleavage. Move the nipple in circles, use light pressure or medium pressure for tissue in the middle of your breasts.

In case you spot any symptoms, contact a doctor immediately.

**Diagnosis will be done in 3 steps:**

1. Breast examination by a doctor
2. Ultrasound or mammogram of breast



### 3. Taking a bit of tissue of the affected area with a needle (biopsy)

Treatment depends on the extent of the disease and is managed by:

- Medicines
- Radiation
- Surgery

Women undergoing this process may become emotionally vulnerable and therefore it is very important that the family members stay supportive to the woman in the entire process and be a strength to them by accompanying them to the doctor, motivating her to continue her routine and encourage her in whatever she wants to pursue.

## x. Cervical Cancer

Initiate discussions with the group on cervical cancer by providing information on what it means. While discussing, try to enlist the steps to self-examine, diagnose and treat, cervical cancer among women. If there are any participants who have had such experience or are cancer survivors may be asked to share their personal experiences, only if they are comfortable. Care must be taken that these could be sensitive issues and therefore these questions should be carefully handled.

A malignant tumour of the lower-most part of the uterus (womb) that can be prevented by PAP smear screening and a HPV vaccine.

**Symptoms** include bleeding in between periods and after sexual intercourse. Foul-smelling white discharge and low back pain or lower abdominal pain may also occur. In some cases there may be no symptoms.

### Early Warning Signs of Cervical Cancer

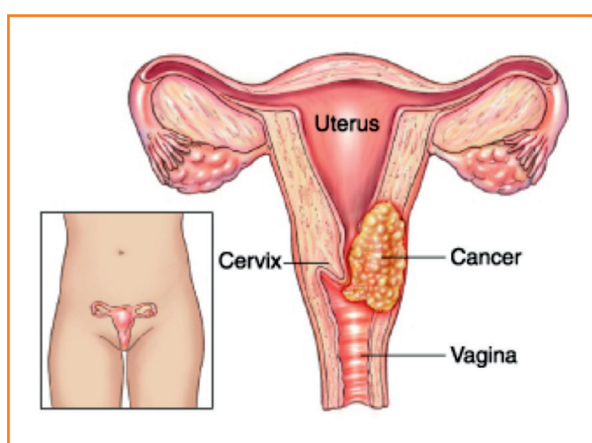
- Vaginal bleeding (either after intercourse, between periods or post-menopause)
- Abnormal vaginal discharge (heavy or with a foul odor)
- Pain during intercourse.
- Pelvic pain.
- Lower back pain.
- Pain and swelling in legs.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Decreased appetite.

**Treatments** Cervical cancer is treated in several ways. It depends on the kind of cervical cancer and how far it has spread. Treatments include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

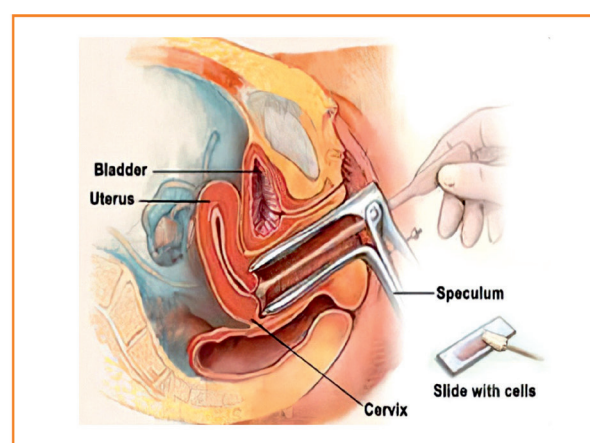
Cervical Cancer is the second most common cancer among women in India with often no causes and often has no symptoms at early stages.

### Some factors may increase the chances of cervical cancer:

- Having multiple sexual partners or having sex with a promiscuous partner
- History of sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- Sexual intercourse at a young age
- High number of deliveries
- Women who smoke cigarettes are twice as likely to develop cervical cancer.
- Regular screening with a Pap smear effectively lowers the risk for developing invasive cervical cancer by detecting precancerous changes in cervical cells.
- Women who do not receive regular Pap smears have a higher risk for the condition.



**Abnormal growth at the entrance of the Uterus**



**PAP Smear test**

### Visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA)

#### Symptoms:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding (e.g., spotting after sexual intercourse, bleeding between menstrual periods, increased menstrual bleeding).
- Abnormal (yellow, odourous) vaginal discharge.
- Low back pain.
- Painful sexual intercourse.
- Painful urination.



## **PAP SMEAR – Women between ages 21 – 65 years should get it done every 3 years. It is –**

- A procedure to test for cervical cancer in women.
- Involves collecting cells from the lower, narrow end of the uterus.
- Detecting cervical cancer early with a Pap smear gives you a greater chance at a cure.

## **Encourage Open Discussions on Myths and Taboos**

At the end of the session, inform the group that a number of myths and taboos have been associated with Women's health. Ask the group members about what kind of myths or restrictions are prevalent in their households and their area. Open discussion about reproductive health and experiences on women's health issues with the group will lead to the right understanding and cross-learning and women being able to see timely medical help.

## **Nutrition care specific to women's health**

- Protective foods rich in vitamin, minerals, and antioxidants to improve one's immunity and health is recommended for daily intake
- Include calcium-rich foods including milk, green leaves, ragi, dairy products, and fish to avoid osteoporosis in the later years (above 50 years)
- Iron-rich foods to avoid anemia and to improve blood volume
- Vitamin C-rich local foods including lemon, oranges, guava, Indian gooseberry etc can be included in the diet often
- Avoid excess sugar, salt, fat, baked and fried foods
- Regular exercise and an active lifestyle is recommended.

## **Women Health Care Services Available in the Government Hospitals**

- I. Health and Wellness Centers providing a host of services for women.
- II. OPD Services.
  - a. All OPD services related to Gynaecology & Obstetrics
  - b. Family Welfare OPD
  - c. Pediatric OPD
- III. Indoor Services– All cases of Gynaecology & Obstetric cases are attended
  - a. Supporting Institutional delivery
  - b. Delivery /nutrition kit distribution
  - c. Nutritional supplements
- IV. Investigations
  - a. Pathology Services
  - b. Ultrasonography
  - c. X-ray



- V. Anaesthetic Services.
- VI. Family Welfare Services- under this Post-Partum centres are located providing following services.
  - a. Counselling services
  - b. Ante Natal Care
  - c. Abortion & Medical Termination of Pregnancy services
  - d. Laparoscopic Abdominal Tubectomy & Non scalpel vasectomy
  - e. Family Welfare Services like IUD insertion, Distribution of Oral Pills & Nirodh
- VII. Universal Immunization Programme
- VIII. Emergency Services
- IX. Medico Legal Services
- X. Ambulance Services
- XI. Telemedical counseling services
- XII. Medical camps

## Role of Self Help Group

- ▶ The group should ensure that family members including adolescents, men, and the elderly understand that women at various ages are affected by many health issues which may be serious and even fatal if left unnoticed and untreated.
- ▶ The group members should ensure that all girls and women in their families know the health risks, are aware of the symptoms and remain watchful regarding their own health.
- ▶ The group members should hold awareness generation sessions with support from ASHA/ANM and create an enabling environment to encourage women to talk about such issues and seek medical help, if required.
- ▶ The SHG members should also ensure that their family members be aware of women-related health issues and have regular monitoring of their family girls' and women's health, keeping alert of their symptoms when expressed.

**Note:** The Self-Help Group should be ready to support those members who face problems or find it difficult to convey these messages and convince their families.

**Session concludes:** End the session by revisiting the questions from the case study and their answers. Thank the participants and close.



The Food, Nutrition, Health and WASH (FNHW) Toolkit has been developed by the National Mission Management Unit (NMMU) with support from Technical Assistance agencies–TA- NRLM (PCI) and inputs from ROSHNI–Centre of Women Collectives led Social Action, National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), State Institutes of Rural Development (SIRDs), National Resource Persons (NRPs), State Rural Livelihood Missions (SRLMs) of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra, JEEViKA Technical Support Program–Project Concern International (JTSP–PCI) and UNICEF state teams from Odisha, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

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