



Preparing to Go Home

The doors open and you are excited to go home. You have no idea what will happen. But, you know it will be better than what you are leaving. Are you ready for what is in front of you?

The outside world will throw many issues at you. You need to be ready to face them. One thing we all face is how to live a healthy lifestyle. Whatever else is going on in your life, without good health there is nothing else that you can do. Finding a job, going to school, and raising your family all need good health. Healthy living is not automatic. You have to be active about getting healthy and staying there. You do this by eating the right foods. Being physically active. Visiting your doctor regularly. Taking any needed medications. And even by listening to your body.

Before Your Release

While in jail you had the chance to join recreation or physical activities. If you did not do a lot, you may have found that you didn't always have the energy to get through the day.

You may have gained weight or had some type of illness. Often when we aren't exercising, our bodies perform at a bare minimum. We become tired more quickly and seem to catch more colds or feel sick more often.

While you are in jail, you should try to take a walk for at least 20-30 minutes each day. You can also make sure that the meals you eat include some type of vegetables or fruit. You should also make sure that you know the results of the physical you got when you arrived. Were any sicknesses pointed out to you, such as high blood pressure? Diabetes? Menstrual or female reproductive concerns? Sexually transmitted infections? Other issues? If so, were you given medication to help? Knowing your medical history and getting a check-up can help you start a healthy lifestyle that will help you in every area of your life.

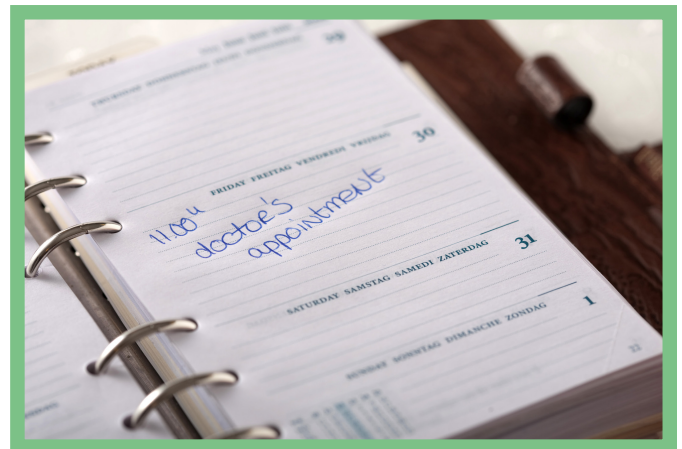
Before you are released, make sure you get a copy of your medical records including all prescriptions. Also get information for doctors, clinics, or medical centers in your area. Be sure that you have a at least 1-3 month supply of all prescribed drugs so that you can keep taking your medications while looking for a place to live and for a local doctor. Take a copy of this information with you and give it to any medical doctor you visit once you get out. This will be helpful to you for future medical treatment if it is ever needed. Also, if you are eligible, now is the time to apply for Medicaid coverage.

After Your Release

Once you are out you will have many things that will keep you busy. Where will I live? How do I get a job? And so on. While these things are all important, so is your health. Without good health you won't feel able do anything. Once you find housing, check with your parole or probation officer or a knowledgeable person who can help you with getting medical insurance or access to a local clinic or health center. If you are eligible for Medicaid, hopefully you applied before you were released. If not, find the nearest social services office to apply. If you are not eligible for Medicaid, under the Affordable Health Care Act, every American citizen can get medical insurance. You can check with your nearest social services office for information on how to apply.

No matter what we look like on the outside, it is our physical inside that matters most. Some simple first steps that you can take on the road to good health are:

- **Sleep** – Aim to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night. Some people feel like they can get by with less sleep. But, a good night's sleep is priceless. Sleep is important because many important things happen to your body and even your brain while you sleep. Sleep has been linked to everything from mental sharpness to weight loss!



- **Eat fruits and vegetables** – It is important to eat fruits and vegetables every day. Whether you cook your vegetables or eat them in a salad, vegetables will give you most of the nutrients your body needs to function effectively. Also, fruit is another healthy choice. Fruit can be substituted for the many sugary snacks you eat during the day.
- **Walk** – Walking is one of the best exercises you can do. It helps you maintain a healthy heart, lungs, and muscles. Many women have formed “power walking” groups that encourage and promote healthy self-esteem. A nice focused walk for 20 -30 minutes outside won’t seem like exercise at all. And, the best benefit of all is that walking won’t cost anything except a good pair of shoes. So you can get the exercise without the expense.
- **Avoid Highly Processed Food** – These days there are many overweight people in the US. Diabetes, a disease related to storing energy, is also a growing problem. When fat was found to be bad for you, food companies began to take it out of foods. To make the foods taste good, many added sugar. A little sugar in your diet is fine. But if it is in lots of things you eat, those little bits add up and it leads to problems like diabetes and obesity. Sugar can have many names too: high fructose corn syrup, cane sugar, or raw sugar for example. Soda, juice, candy, and even pasta sauce, bread and salad dressing can all be high in sugar! Try your best to avoid ingredients your grandmother wouldn’t recognize, and look for things lower in sugar.
- **Exercise** – Exercise is important to help build a healthy heart and body. It can help you feel better about yourself and to see the world in a better light. There are all types of exercises, so pick the one that is most interesting to you. That way you will stick with it. There are options from aerobics to dancing to team sports. Try to do some exercise every day.

Your inner beauty is a gift to the world. It is up to you to protect and nourish it through healthy living. If you neglect it, the stresses of everyday living will wear at it and could cause you serious problems. Your body is a temple to be embraced and cared for. Do your best to make it last for a long time. You only get one!

Routine Medical Check-ups to Have:

Regular medical check-ups are important to any good health routine. Some of the basic check-ups that are important for all women are:

General Physical – Visit your doctor at least once a year for a physical. During this check-up a doctor will check your overall health. Some of the basic things they will check are: heart, heart rate, blood pressure, ears, eyes, throat, reflexes, and oxygen levels in the blood. During your annual physical the doctor may also draw some blood to check your blood count, cholesterol, glucose level for any symptoms of diabetes, HIV-Aids, and iron level to see if you are anemic. Remember that many important medical screenings such as pap smears, mammograms, STI’s, etc. may be offered at no cost under the Affordable Health Care Act. Check with your local health career center for more information.

Dental Exam – You should get a check-up once a year and have your teeth cleaned twice a year. The dentist will take x-rays of your teeth and alert you to any problems you might have. Addressing your dental needs is important for employment interviews. First impressions are often made by appearances and your smile can say a lot about you.

Breast Self-Exams – If you don’t know how to do a breast self-exam, ask your doctor or nurse to show you how. Once you learn you should check your breasts every month for lumps or irregularities. If you are older than 40 you should start getting annual mammograms. If you have signs of breast cancer, it’s better to catch it early!

Pap Smear and Pelvic Exam – These exams should be done once a year. These exams are to check for any gynecological issues. These exams are very important if you are sexually active as they can detect any sexually transmitted diseases as well.

Skin Self-Exam – This is probably the exam that is most often forgotten. Once every month or so, you should look at your entire body to see if you have any new moles or if any of your moles have changed in size, shape, or color. If so, you should see a dermatologist (skin doctor).

Eye Exams – You should get an eye exam every other year. In addition to finding out if you need glasses, eye exams also check for any ailments of the eye such as glaucoma, etc.

Screening for Sexually Transmitted Infections – Many STIs have no signs or symptoms or they have mild signs that can be easily overlooked. If you are sexually active, have a new partner, more than one partner, or if for any reason believe you may have been exposed to an STI, it is important to see a healthcare provider about getting tested for these and other common STIs: chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV, herpes, HPV, syphilis and trichomoniasis.

Resources

Affordable Health Care – This website gives information about the insurance offered under the Affordable Care Act and how to find it on the “healthcare marketplace.” People with lower incomes may be eligible for insurance at lower costs.

General Healthcare Information for Women – This website has all kinds of general healthcare information geared toward women. www.womenshealth.gov

Find a Health Center Near You – The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) health centers care for you, even if you have no health insurance. You pay what you can afford, based on your income. They created this webpage to help people find health centers near them. You can search for health centers near an address or place, or you can search by state or county. <http://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>