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The health advice that
Doctors give their
Friends

From prioritising 'me time' to always using sunscreen, these are the simple insider tips that money just can't buy

By Sarah Marinos

There's definitely an upside to having a friend who also happens to be a medical expert: he or she is a direct line to every burning health question you've ever wanted to ask—no waiting room or lengthy examination time required. But if you don't have a personal confidante who doubles as a doctor, here's the good news: we've asked four top medical professionals to share the important advice that they give their nearest and dearest. It's guaranteed to have you feeling better, stronger and healthier, and there's not a prescription pad in sight ...

“Remember what you used to be passionate about, and then do things that help take you out of yourself”

THE PSYCHOTHERAPIST

Marie Rowland, 44, is a psychotherapist who practises in Sydney, NSW.

What do friends really want to know?
They usually pose a question as if it's about someone else. A woman might ask how I'd advise a client whose husband was losing interest in her, or what I'd do if I were stressed and no longer felt I was the woman I wanted to be.

Your best advice for 40+ women?
Many of the women whom I see feel invisible and don't get noticed like they used to. They don't enjoy the same attention from their partner, so they worry about their relationship fracturing. My advice to them is to win back their sense of self—to find that person they used to love. Remember what you were passionate about, and then do things that take you out of yourself. When you always put your needs last, you tend to lose confidence and self-esteem. You don't feel like you can ask for what you want in a relationship, because you believe that you don't deserve it.

I see a lot of women who feel as though they don't measure up. These women need to stop criticising themselves and believing that everything they do has to be perfect! After I had my two kids, I remember looking at myself in the mirror and being really unhappy with the way I looked. Then I realised that I'd created two gorgeous children, and that I should thank my body for that.

How do you look after your health?
I prioritise myself in exactly the same way that I prioritise my children, my partner and my friends. Every week, I lock in time just for myself, whether it's for yoga, Pilates or a dance class.

“No matter how old you are, sex always comes with the risk of infection, so use a condom every time”

THE GYNAECOLOGIST

Dr Elizabeth Farrell, 64, is a gynaecologist at Jean Hailes for Women's Health in Melbourne, VIC.

Your most common talking points?
They often want to know about the best length of time to be on hormone-replacement therapy (HRT) and what its risks are. People also ask me how to advise daughters who have painful periods. And if a friend starts a new relationship, they might have a few questions about sexual health.

What do you wish everyone knew?
Hormone-replacement therapy is a very personal choice. If my friends are fit, healthy and under the age of 60, I let them know that the risks associated with HRT are usually very low. But they do need to see a GP for annual check-ups.

About a quarter of women experience menopause symptoms that last for more than five years, and one in 10 women live with the effects for more than 10 years. If those symptoms have an adverse impact on her quality of life, a woman can be on HRT for as long as she needs to be, but she should also be seeing her doctor for regular assessment.

When friends tell me that their daughters have very painful periods, I advise them to see their GP. About 10% of women suffer from endometriosis, of which severe pelvic or period pain are symptoms. People think that period pain is a normal 'female thing', but it's not.

Doctors are diagnosing more and more postmenopausal women with sexually transmitted infections, because they're in new relationships but neglecting to use condoms. No matter how old you are, sex always comes with the risk of infection, so use a condom every time. **P**

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