Getting Through the To-Dos
Pill-Taking Tips from the Experts: You!

Chinese proverb says, “Habits are cobwebs at first; cables at last.”
Hormone and Calcium/Vitamin D study participants know the effort of taking study pills each day. The task has likely become easier over time as focused commitment gave way to daily habit. But what if you’re struggling? How can your “cobweb” habits become “cables”? We asked WHI participants around the country to share what’s made their routine easier:

Pill Holders
- “I use the pill reminder box and leave the lid open to let myself know if I’ve taken that day’s pills.”
- “I use a pill keeper when traveling.”
- “I use the weekly pill holders WHI provided.”
- “For the Calcium/Vitamin D study, I use two weekly pill boxes—one for a.m. pills and one for p.m. pills—and keep them where I’ll see them each day.”

Mealtimes
- “I keep the pill bottles on the kitchen table so I remember to take them with meals.”
- “I commute 55 miles to the office and eat breakfast on the way. I prepare that meal the evening before and put the day’s pills into a small bottle that goes into my food bag.”

“Other Medications
- “I take them at the same time as my vitamins.”
- “I take my study pills with my other routine medications.”

The Morning Cup
- “I keep the pills next to the coffee pot.”
- “I put my pills by my morning coffee cup.”
- “I put my pills in the coffee filter every night and take them before I make coffee in the morning.”
- “I take my pill first thing in the morning with a glass of water. I’m usually thirsty when I wake up, so I have it with my first glass of water.”

Continued on page 2
Pill-Taking Tips

Location, Location
- “My pills are in the bathroom by my toothbrush.”
- “I made a smiley face sun and attached it to a paper cup with a sign that says, ‘Take Me.’ I have it right next to my faucet so I see it in the morning.”
- “My pills are by my deodorant.”
- “I set my pills on the window sill above my kitchen sink.”
- “I keep my pills beside my underwear.”
- “I place my study pills next to my computer. When I check e-mail daily, I also take my pill.”

Pets
- “I put my pills by my dog’s medicine.”
- “I keep my pills beside the cat food. I know the cat will not let me forget!”

Form Completion Tips
The WHI forms you receive in the mail, such as the Food Frequency Questionnaire or the Medical History Update, provide important information. Here are some tips from WHI participants on how to get these forms completed:
- “When I get it in the mail, I tell myself, ‘Do it now!’”
- “I put a reminder on my calendar.”
- “I complete them as soon as I receive them.”
- “I put the forms with my other WHI stuff so they don’t get lost.”

Dutiful Spouse
- “I have my husband remind me to take them.”
- “My husband puts my pills out for me.”
- “My husband reminds me when he makes breakfast.”

Visual Cues
- “I use Post-It notes to remind me.”
- “I have my pills out on a dish where they can be seen.”
- “I put a pill reminder on my calendar and cross it off when I’ve taken it.”
- “I have an appointment reminder set on my work computer. When the reminder pops up, I leave it there until I take my pill. I do the same thing on my home computer for the weekend.”

Routines
- “I take them at the same time each day.”
- “The key is your mind-set: dedication and setting a pattern.”
- “It’s part of my routine that I associate with washing the dishes at breakfast and in the evening.”
- “The bottom line is routine.”

It’s clear from the wide variety of methods that there’s no one way to remember to take your study pills. If what you’re doing isn’t working, try one of these suggestions. Remember what inspired you to be part of WHI; we still need your dedication. As Olympian Jim Ryun said, “Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.” Taking pills, filling out forms, attending a clinic visit or dietary meeting—each of these habits is important for the success of WHI.

Letters
We’d love to hear feedback on the newsletter and your story ideas. We regret that we cannot answer questions about individual medical conditions. Published letters may be edited. Send a letter to:

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HI lost one of its own in the terrorist attacks last September.

Georgine Corrigan, a member of the Hormone and Calcium/Vitamin D programs at the Honolulu Clinical Center, was on the hijacked flight that crashed in Pennsylvania.

Georgine's daughter, Laura Brough, says she learned to be strong from her mother, a trait she's needed in the months since her loss. "My mom believed hard work brings good things," recalls Laura. Georgine was a well-known antiques and collectibles dealer in Honolulu. Also an artist, she painted Hawaiian floral prints on Christmas ornaments and drew silhouette pictures of people.

Laura believes a combination of things led her mother to join WHI in 1997. "Breast cancer was a huge concern to her," Laura says, referring to a family history of the disease. "The annual mammogram was comforting to her. She felt well-taken care of at the clinic." She also remembers Georgine as a woman with a giving spirit who would help others in any way she could. "She joined the study because she was that kind of lady," her daughter explains.

Josephine Nicolo, Lead Clinic Practitioner at the Honolulu WHI Clinical Center, remembers Georgine fondly. "She was energetic and always positive," Josephine recalls. "She remembered everyone's name in the clinic. We spent time talking about antiques and grandparenting—she was a devoted grandma."

Georgine lived with her daughter and grandchildren. She is dearly missed by her two grandsons, Evan, 6, and Dylan, 4. Laura says Dylan talks about his grandmother being his angel in heaven.

All of the WHI scientists and staff join in expressing their sympathy to Georgine's family during this difficult time.

Our entire nation, including many WHI participants and staff, was impacted by the events of September 11, 2001. At press time, several Clinical Centers were aware of participants and/or staff members from their sites who had lost loved ones in the attacks. We are so saddened by the scores of lives touched by tragedy.

Although we may feel helpless at the hands of terrorists, we, as women, are not powerless to change the future of women's health. By contributing to this important study today, you are showing your faith in tomorrow.
FOCUS ON FINDINGS

In this ongoing column, we feature WHI research findings. Our spotlight in this issue is on a scientific paper written by Ruth Bush, a graduate student at the University of California, San Diego, and Robert Langer, Principal Investigator at the La Jolla WHI Clinical Center. Their findings were published in the Western Journal of Medicine. The two investigators looked at data from the screening of 2,453 WHI participants at the La Jolla WHI Clinical Center and its satellite clinic in Chula Vista, California, to see what factors might influence women to get mammograms. Even though mammography (an X-ray exam of the breasts) is an effective method for detecting breast cancer in women ages 50 and older, many women do not get mammograms.

The researchers looked at the mammography and personal information provided by the participants to see if factors such as ethnicity, income, education, marital status, age, and access to medical services affected mammogram use.

Their analysis showed the following factors strongly influenced whether or not women had regular mammograms: having health insurance, a regular medical provider, an annual household income greater than $20,000, a high school diploma, as well as being 65 years or older. Taking all of these into account, the most significant factor was having a medical provider.

For WHI participants and all women, these results underscore the importance of having a regular medical provider to ensure that important routine exams are carried out.


Vital SIGNS

Thyroid Disease

The small, but mighty, thyroid gland produces hormones that influence every organ, tissue, and cell in your body. Metabolism, temperature, heart rate, muscle strength, and mood are all influenced by this gland, which is located at the base of the throat.

Thyroid problems are not always obvious. In fact, many symptoms of thyroid problems may be blamed on other things like aging. Researchers estimate about 13 percent of American adults have undetected thyroid problems, yet more than half remain undiagnosed. Women are five to eight times more likely than men to have a thyroid disorder.

The American Thyroid Association recommends getting a thyroid check every five years.

However, certain symptoms should be discussed right away with your doctor:

- Fatigue, weight gain, sensitivity to cold, dry skin, hair loss, depression, impaired memory, constipation, and swelling may be caused by an underactive gland (hypothyroidism).

- Fatigue, as well as weight loss, sensitivity to heat, sweating, shaking, depression, nervousness, diarrhea, and insomnia may be caused by an overactive gland (hyperthyroidism).

A simple TSH test (which measures thyroid-stimulating hormone level) can detect how well your thyroid is working. There are many well-established treatments for managing an underactive or overactive thyroid gland.

If you think you might have thyroid problems, check with your doctor. If you already have thyroid problems, your health care provider will probably be monitoring your thyroid levels at least annually. Some thyroid medications (such as Synthroid) might be affected by other medications you are taking. As always, be sure to let your health care provider know you are a WHI participant, especially those stopping or starting study pills.
How to Get the Most from Your Doctor Visit

Good communication is key to most relationships, and your rapport with your doctor isn’t any different. It sounds easy enough, but good communication can be hard when you’re stressed or ill, or when your doctor seems rushed or distracted. Keep these pointers in mind:

Be prepared
Before going to the doctor, make a list of what you want to discuss. If you have more than a few items to talk about, put them in order of importance to you. Be as detailed as possible when describing your condition—when it started, how often it happens, and if it’s getting better or worse. Take along your insurance cards, names of your other doctors, and any needed health records. Remind your doctor that you are part of WHI. Some doctors suggest bringing along all of your medications in a bag, or at least bringing a list of what you take.

Update your doctor
Think of any important changes or events in your health or life since your last visit. For instance, have you been treated in the emergency room? Lost weight? Had trouble sleeping? Your doctor may ask how your life is going. This isn’t just small talk; changes in your life, such as divorce or the death of a loved one, can affect your health.

Be honest
It’s tempting to say what you think the doctor wants to hear—that your diet’s better than it really is or that you’re feeling great when you’re actually depressed or low on energy. Tempting as it is, your doctor can give you the best treatment only if you say what’s really going on.

Get the information
Listen carefully to your doctor’s advice and recommendations. Take notes or use a tape recorder. Or bring a family member or friend along as a second set of ears. Whenever possible, have the doctor provide written instructions and explanations. If you want details about your illness, ask your doctor to recommend reading material.

Ask questions
There are no “dumb” questions. All of your questions are important and doctors expect them. You’re entitled to a diagnosis in terms you understand. You should also get a full explanation of all tests or treatments, as well as the risks and benefits of various alternatives. If these are not provided, ask for them. It may help to repeat back, in your own words, what you think your doctor said and ask, “Is this correct?” Ask your doctor when would be the best time to call if you have additional questions later.

How well you and your doctor talk to each other is one of the most important parts of getting good health care. As an active participant, you can work together with your doctor to solve medical problems and maintain your health.

Better WHI Clinic Visits
Your time is precious and we appreciate your dedication to WHI through your clinic visits. Here’s how to make the most of your visit:

- Bring along any new medical reports you’ve received from your doctor.
- Return your study pill bottle(s) and forms to the clinic (set them by your purse or front door so you won’t forget).
- Bring along all medications and supplements you’re taking.
- Share your concerns about personal health issues or recent research study findings.
Unpaid Labors Reward Lifelong Volunteer

Whoever said, “If you want something done, give it to a busy person,” must have been talking about Paulette “Polly” Caudle. Whether it’s hosting travelers, spearheading an art campaign, or helping Girl Scouts reach goals, this enthusiastic 64-year-old does it all with energy and a smile—and an eye on her next endeavor.

Polly joined the Dietary and Calcium/Vitamin D parts of WHI six years ago. In fact, she was so eager to take part that she was the first participant enrolled at the Winston-Salem Clinic in North Carolina. “I want to stay healthy,” Polly says of her motivation to join. “And it’s for the health of my daughters and granddaughters. I hope it helps women around the world.”

Polly’s concern for women around the world is born out of her globe-spanning friendships. For the past 10 years, she’s been part of Friendship Force, an international cultural exchange organization. By hosting travelers and visiting homes around the world, Polly sees other countries and promotes friendship and goodwill.

With a love for traveling and history, Polly is well-equipped to lead Girl Scouts internationally, which she’s done to places like Switzerland, Bermuda, India, Scotland, and Mexico. Polly was a Girl Scout herself and has stayed involved with scouting for five decades. When her daughters were younger, she progressed from leading their troops to becoming a senior leader. Now she trains leaders and sits on the national board of directors. “It challenges me to give my best to the girls and my community—and they are worth it!” Polly says. “I want to give the girls opportunities they might not have any other place.” She estimates leading at least 300 young women and helping more than 45 achieve their Gold Award, the highest honor in Girl Scouting. Her years of service earned Polly the Juliette Low World Friendship Medal, in recognition of outstanding efforts to extend opportunities for international understanding through Girl Scouting. It is awarded to only two people in the U.S. each year.

Polly is employed as the state treasurer for North Carolina’s Extension and Community Association; she does the bookkeeping for this continuing education program. She also works as a tour guide at a local Protestant Moravian Museum, teaching heritage skills to children.

She and her husband of 43 years are very involved in their church. Last spring, Polly led her fourth group of Girl Scouts and church youth and adults on an annual visit to a Navajo reservation in Arizona. They taught Bible school and did painting and remodeling service projects.

Sometimes Polly’s many interests and activities merge into new projects. On a Friendship Force stay in Australia, her host was part of a hospital art campaign. “I thought, boy, that sounds like a neat project,” recalls Polly. “I wanted to beautify the white walls of our hospital [Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center] and bring people from all walks of life to paint together.” So Polly applied for and received funding for a “PaintFest” at the site. An artist was hired to sketch butterflies for participants to paint. Hundreds joined in painting over 500 tiles to adorn the ceilings. Four murals and 126 multi-canvass paintings were also created.

“I volunteer because I enjoy it and it’s fun,” Polly concludes. “And I just want the world to be a better place.”
FOR YOUR HEALTH

- Your fingernails and toenails are vulnerable to skin cancer, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. If caught early, skin cancer of the nail can often be cured, usually with surgery. Apply sunscreen to your skin and your nails and consider wearing clear nail polish containing sunscreen.

- When a tooth gets knocked out, sometimes it can be saved. The best way to preserve a tooth as you’re rushing to the dentist is to put it back in its socket and hold it, or place the tooth in a cup of milk or water.

- Thinking of signing up to be an organ donor after your death, but concerned about your family’s feelings? The National Kidney Foundation surveyed 500 families of organ donors and what they found is reassuring: 9 out of 10 family members found their loved one’s organ donation a positive experience.

- Don’t write with pencils or felt-tip pens if you have hand pain from arthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome. Roller-ball pens glide more easily across paper.

- Containers that aren’t labeled “microwave safe” may release chemicals into food when heated, so don’t recycle margarine tubs or yogurt cups as microwave bowls. While plastic microwave-safe containers are fine for heating leftovers, for longer cooking in the microwave, it’s better to use heatproof glass and/or ceramic dishes.

- Women seeking a second opinion about a suspicious finding on a mammogram should insist on taking the original film, not a copy, to the second radiologist. The clarity of the film declines slightly each time it’s copied.

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Self-test for Macular Degeneration

The chart below may be helpful in showing signs of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of blindness in the U.S. in older adults. Early diagnosis of AMD can lead to effective treatment. This test is not a substitute for regular eye exams/tests.

Instructions
If you use reading glasses or contacts, wear them during the test. Hold the grid at eye level at a comfortable reading distance, about 12 to 16 inches away. Cover one eye at a time and focus on the center dot. Do you notice any wavy, broken, or distorted lines, or blurry or missing areas? If so, contact your eye care provider immediately.
Stay In Touch

Don’t forget to call your local Clinical Center if your address or phone number change!

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