

Research Made Easy: The National Women's Health Information Center

By Jean Oxendine

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Where can you go to find information on minority women's health without spending hours looking? The answer may be right at your fingertips. By calling their toll-free phone number or browsing their Web site, the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) can provide you with access to more than 80 federal health clearinghouses and hundreds of private sector organizations resources.

A free service of HHS's Office of Women's Health (OWH), the NWHIC covers a variety of topics, some exclusive to women's health issues, and others that affect both men and women.

This is the "women's health central" for federal and private sector information about women's health for the public, health care professionals, medical researchers, educators, and women in the military, according to Suzanne Haynes, M.D., Assistant Director for Science at OWH. The NWHIC World Wide Web site can help you link to, read, and download a wide variety of women's health-related material developed by HHS, other federal agencies, and private sector resources. From the Web site, you can access and download general or specific women's health information and link to OWH's Web site.

The NWHIC can also be accessed through an information and referral telephone line which has information specialists available to clarify information needs and identify the most appropriate federal and private sector resources. And, when possible, they can contact federal agencies on behalf of callers to order documents from diverse federal organizations—thus saving callers time. The toll free telephone line (1-800-994-WOMAN) can be accessed from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.

If you require more specialized information, they can direct you to other federal toll-free lines where you will find specialists trained to answer specific health questions.

The NWHIC is updated each week, according to Dr. Haynes. "We have to be in there changing it all of the time. Many topics, such as the 'What's New?' section are constantly evolving," she said.

The NWHIC Web site offers three major categories through which women can retrieve health information. These are: "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ's), "Health Information," and "What's New?"

There is also a section titled, "References," which provides directories and listings of clearinghouses and hotlines, as well as databases of health information and other references. The Health Information category allows women to search the Web site using key words.

The FAQ section provides general information for women on each subject matter and is not race-specific. As a follow up, each FAQ refers users to the "For More Information" section which lists organizations, Web sites, and clearinghouses. Often of interest to minority women in the FAQ section are: diabetes; diet and nutrition; exercise and high blood cholesterol; HIV/AIDS and STDS; smoking; and syphilis.

The "What's New" section provides information on upcoming conferences and announcements, and the "Current Events" section lists the most up-to-date information. A "Reference" section lists resources on topics, such as directories and publications on women's health, including minority women's health issues.

The NWHIC will be publicized through a series of mini-launches at various women's health meetings and symposiums, according to Dr. Haynes. "One exciting development with the NWHIC will take place next year," she said. OWH will partner with the American Heart Association to create a "Health Risk Appraisal." Through the Web site, women will enter their age, racial/ethnic group, and their degree of willingness to change their habits to improve their health. They will then receive individualized, culturally sensitive feed back listing steps they should take to improve their health. "The response will be tailored for each woman," said Dr. Haynes.

The NWHIC is available to address the unique health concerns of women from all races. Visitors to the Web site and callers should be aware that material contained in the NWHIC is intended to help educate and inform the public about women's health issues, but it isn't a substitute for medical advice from a health care professional.

The NWHIC is a joint project of the OWH and the Defense Women's Research Program of the U.S. Department of Defense.

Visit the NWHIC on the Internet at <http://www.4woman.org>, or by using the toll-free telephone number, 1-800-994-9662. ❖

