

Why Women's Health Research Matters....

Because Sex Matters...

Differences between the sexes exist and whether a person is male or female matters in the prevalence and severity of a broad range of diseases, disorders, and conditions. It matters at every stage of life and at every level - from the single cell to the entire body. It matters to the health of everyone.

Understanding why there are such large differences between how women and men experience diseases is at the heart of women's health research. Biomedical research is the key to finding important answers to such questions as: why women are afflicted with depression twice as often as men; and why eating disorders are 10 times more common in women than men; and why lupus and other autoimmune diseases affect women three to four times as often as men. Such research has important implications for both women and men in terms of clinical practice, disease prevention and manifestation and medical education.

Research is crucial to health care planners and clinicians who serve women. It can provide the evidence basis for real improvements in the well-being of women, their families and their communities.

What is medical research?

Medical research studies are designed to provide information on health or disease. The purpose of medical research is to learn how our bodies work, why we get sick, and what we can do to get and stay well with the goal of improving our health. Medical research studies often aim to advance our knowledge of a medical condition by answering specific questions. Medical research strives to find new ways to treat and prevent disease, and help us to understand how and why some traditional, "old-fashioned" remedies (like chicken soup for colds) work. There are several types of medical research. Some studies are done to learn what causes disease, and how to avoid getting sick. Others are done to improve how we treat disease.

Why are women needed for medical research studies?

For many years, researchers did not include women in medical research studies because they did not believe that a person's sex mattered and because it would make the studies too complicated. They just assumed that if a treatment worked for men, it would work the same way for women.

Now we know that women and men can and do react differently to the same treatment. Some treatments that work for men may not work as well for women, and some that work for women may not work as well for men. Plus, women and men may have very different side effects from a drug. Women may need a higher or lower dose of a drug to get the same effect as men, and devices that are designed for men's bodies may not fit women. Women may also require different means of disease prevention than men.

In addition, biological differences between women and men result in different medical needs. Clearly there are conditions that only affect women, such as pregnancy and menopause. There are also diseases, such as uterine cancer, that only affect women. Other diseases and conditions, such as osteoporosis, breast cancer, diabetes, and arthritis, affect more women than men.

New Discoveries Every Day in Women's Health Research @ VCU

At Virginia Commonwealth University, a national leader in women's health research, experts are exploring all facets of research that affect women across the lifespan through basic, preventive, clinical and applied research. This commitment is evident in the breadth and diversity of specialized women's health research being undertaken. VCU researchers are collaborating to study depression and menopause, treatments for cancer, addiction and abuse of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, reproductive biology, osteoporosis, preterm birth and infant mortality, diabetes, obesity and metabolic syndrome, mood and anxiety disorders, incontinence, health disparities and community engaged research addressing pressing community identified needs, to name of few of the current areas focusing specifically on women.

Types of Research a Visual of Translational Research Continuum



"Research universities provide the nexus of discovery, education, and service."
Francis L. Macrina, PhD, VCU Vice President for Research

Receiving Care at an Academic Medical Center

Virginia Commonwealth University Health System (VCUHS) provides specialized surgeries, complex treatments, and life-saving emergency care. As an academic medical center, the faculty members' extensive knowledge, expertise, and scientific inquiry inform the state-of-the-art services that their patients experience. With over 200 specialty centers, VCUHS and the five health science schools work diligently to bring their discoveries from the laboratories to the bedside as quickly and safely as possible.

Improvement in our health and health care depends upon new scientific knowledge that can be translated into clinical and personal practice. Yet, research targeting women's health and the effects of gender on health outcomes has only become a focus of attention in recent years. Our program, the Institute for Women's Health at Virginia Commonwealth University, is responding to the need for gender-specific health research, treatment and information.

The VCU Institute for Women's Health provides leadership, vision and support to a growing network of women's health researchers, policy makers, healthcare providers and women. We are proud to be creating a visionary and cutting-edge women's health research agenda that will make a real and positive difference in the lives of all women and girls of Virginia.

VCU Medical Center Specializing in all Stages of a Woman's Life

Women's Health at VCU Health System offers a wide range of services for patients.

To find out information on a particular service, please contact:

Information and Referral Center at (800) 762-6161, on weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm

For appointments call: 804-560-8950 (Stony Point Women's Health Center)

or 1-866-829-6626 (toll-free)