

## Routine Healthcare for Women

Routine checkups can find health problems early and help prevent more serious problems. How often you have checkups and tests depends on your age, your health problems, and your family health history. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about how often you should have a physical exam and how often you need screening tests.

If you are having any symptoms that you think may mean a problem, do not wait for your next regular checkup to see your healthcare provider. Get it taken care of right away.

### What needs to be checked and how often?

If you are feeling healthy and not having any symptoms of illness, the recommended health checks include:

- ✓ **Weight:** At least once a year, preferably each time you visit your provider.
- ✓ **Blood pressure measurement:** At least once a year for all women.
- ✓ **Clinical breast exam by your provider:** At least every 3 years if you are 20 to 39 years old. Get an exam every year if you are 40 or older.
- ✓ **Mammogram:** As often as your healthcare provider recommends based on your personal and family history for breast cancer. Medical organizations do not agree on how often you should have a mammogram. The US Preventive Services Task Force recommends a mammogram every 2 years for women 50 to 74 years old. The American Cancer Society recommends a mammogram every year for women 40 and older. Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should start having mammograms and how often you should have them.
- ✓ **Pelvic exam:** Every year if you are 21 years old or older. You may need a pelvic exam at other times if you are having problems.
- ✓ **Pap and HPV tests:** As often as your provider recommends if you are 21 or older. You should have a Pap test to check for cervical cancer and precancer changes at least every 3 years until you are 65. If you are 30 years old or older, an HPV test may be done at the same time as the Pap test. HPV can cause abnormal cells and lead to cervical cancer. You may need more frequent tests if there are things that put you at a higher risk for cervical cancer or if you have had abnormal test results. Ask your healthcare provider about this. If you are over 65 years old, ask your provider if you can stop having Pap and HPV tests.
- ✓ **Cholesterol test.** At least every 5 years. You will need more frequent testing if you have abnormal results, or a health problem such as diabetes or heart problem.
- ✓ **Blood sugar test for type 2 diabetes:** At least once a year if your blood pressure, blood lipids (cholesterol), or weight are high or you have a family history of type 2 diabetes.

- ✓ **Colon and rectal cancer screening:** You should have 1 of these 3 methods of screening if you are 50 to 75 years old and have an average risk of colon cancer:
  - A fecal occult blood test once a year to check for hidden blood in your bowel movements.
  - A sigmoidoscopy exam every 5 years and fecal occult blood testing at least every 3 years between the 5-year exams.
  - A colonoscopy every 10 years.

You may need to start colorectal cancer screening earlier if you have a higher risk of colon cancer, such as a family history of colon cancer, especially before age 50. Talk to your healthcare provider about this.

- ✓ **Chlamydia test:** Every year if you are sexually active and under 25 or if you have a high risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- ✓ **Gonorrhea and syphilis tests:** You may need to be tested for these infections if you are at high risk for these sexually transmitted infections (STIs)—for example, you have a history of STIs, a new sex partner, or more than 1 sex partner.
- ✓ **HIV test for the AIDS virus** If you are 15 to 65 years old your healthcare provider may recommend that you be tested for HIV. Younger teens and older adults who are at increased risk should also be screened.
- ✓ **Tuberculosis (TB) test:** Every year if you have a high risk of TB; for example, because:
  - You are a healthcare worker, drug user, or immigrant.
  - You have diabetes, HIV, or another condition that weakens your immune system.
  - You have close contact with someone infected with TB.
- ✓ **Bone density test** for osteoporosis: At age 65 years if your risk is normal and at 60 if you have a high risk (for example, because you smoke or do not get regular exercise). Osteoporosis is a disease that thins and weakens bones to the point where they break easily.
- ✓ **Hearing test:** If you are 65 or older.
- ✓ **Eye exam:** Everyone should have regular eye exams. If you don't have problems with your vision or other eye symptoms, you should have an eye exam:
  - At least once during your 20s, and twice during your 30s.
  - Every 2 to 4 years if you are age 41 to 64.
  - Every 1 to 2 years if you are age 65 or older.
- ✓ **Skin:** If you have any moles or abnormal areas of skin you would like your provider to check.
- ✓ **Mouth:** Every year for routine dental exam and cleaning, more often for sores of the gums, especially if you smoke, chew tobacco, wear dentures, or have a medical condition such as diabetes or heart disease that can be made worse by problems with your teeth or gums.

You may need other tests as well. You and your healthcare provider need to talk about what is right for you based on your symptoms and your personal and family medical history.

## What shots do I need?

Get the shots your healthcare provider recommends for you. They may include vaccines against:

- ✓ Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis
- ✓ Flu
- ✓ HPV (human papillomavirus) through age 26
- ✓ Measles, mumps, and rubella
- ✓ Hepatitis A
- ✓ Hepatitis B
- ✓ Pneumococcal disease
- ✓ Chickenpox
- ✓ Shingles

## What else can I do to stay healthy?

- **Ask about breast self-exams.** Ask your healthcare provider about doing breast self-exams. These exams help you be more familiar with your body. They could help you notice changes that need to be checked for breast cancer.
- **Follow a healthy lifestyle.** Eat a healthy diet. Try to keep a healthy weight. If you are overweight, lose weight. Stay fit with the right kind of exercise for you. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Limit caffeine. Learn to manage stress. Try deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed. If you smoke, try to quit. Talk to your healthcare provider about ways to quit smoking. If you want to drink alcohol, ask your healthcare provider how much is safe for you to drink.

If you are trying to get pregnant or are at risk for getting pregnant, you should take a supplement that contains folic acid every day. Folic acid is very important for spinal cord development of the baby.

- **Take care of your teeth.** Visit your dentist regularly. Brush your teeth with fluoride toothpaste twice a day. Also floss your teeth daily.
- **Practice safe sex.** Use latex or polyurethane condoms during foreplay and every time you have vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Have just 1 sexual partner who is not having sex with anyone else.
- **Ask about hormone use.** During or after menopause, discuss the risks and benefits of use of hormone replacement therapy with your healthcare provider.
- Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you have new or worsening symptoms.

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