

Women's Health: Preventive Screenings, Part I

Women should regularly meet with their doctor to discuss their overall health, ask questions and get preventive care. Preventive screenings help detect disease and illness earlier, often leading to faster recovery or less-severe consequences.

Bone Density Test

This test measures the density of your bones (lower back, hip region, wrist and heel) to help determine your risk of developing osteoporosis, which makes bones more fragile and likely to break. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends that women age 65 and older be routinely screened. They suggest that routine screenings begin after menopause for women with an increased risk of developing osteoporosis.

Dental Exam

The American Dental Association recommends regular dental exams to help detect tooth decay and oral cancer. Your dentist can also evaluate your bite and identify problems such as grinding your teeth or issues with your jaw joint.

Eye Exam

Eye exams can determine whether you need glasses or contact lenses, and can identify vision problems such as glaucoma, macular degeneration and cataracts. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends the following screening schedule:

- At least once in your twenties, and twice in your thirties.
- A baseline eye exam at age 40, then as doctor recommends until age 64.
- Every one to two years beginning at age 65.

Hearing Test

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association recommends hearing screenings at least every 10 years until age 50, and every three years thereafter.

Skin Exam

To check for skin cancer, your doctor will examine your skin for moles that are irregularly shaped, have varied colors, are asymmetric, are greater than the size of a pencil eraser, or have grown or changed since your last visit. You should have a skin exam every three years between the ages of 20 and 40, and annually thereafter. It is also important to check your own skin once a month.

Blood Pressure Screenings

Healthy women with normal blood pressure (120/80 or below) should receive blood pressure screenings at least every two years.

Women's Health: Preventive Screenings – Part Two

Meeting with your doctor regularly and establishing a relationship will not only make you feel more comfortable, but it will also help your doctor get to know you and your body, making it easier to detect changes. You should talk to your doctor about preventive care and stay on track with the following preventive screenings.

Mammograms

Early detection is an important factor in the success of treating breast cancer. Screenings can lead to finding and treating lumps in your breasts one to three years before you would have felt or noticed them.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that women start regular mammograms at 40 years old—instead of the previously recommended age of 50. Similarly, according to the American Cancer Society (ACS), women between 40 and 44 have the option to start screening every year. The ACS recommends that women start having mammogram screenings every year starting at age 45 through 54. Women 55 and older can switch to a mammogram every other year or continue yearly screenings. Regardless of age, however, high-risk women should talk to their doctors about whether to have mammograms and how often.

Pap Smears

A Pap smear looks for changes in the cells within the cervix. These changes can predict cervical cancer or conditions that could eventually develop into cancer. It's generally recommended that women have their first Pap

smear at age 21, and, after age 21, the following screening schedule is suggested:

- Age 21 to 29—every three years.
- Age 30 to 65—every five years if combined with an HPV test, or every three years if done alone.

- Age 65 and older—you may stop having Pap tests if you've had adequate prior screening and do not have a high risk for cervical cancer.

Pelvic Exams

A pelvic exam allows doctors to look for signs of illness within the organs including the uterus, cervix, fallopian tubes, ovaries, bladder and rectum. Current guidelines recommend that pelvic exams be done at the same time as Pap smears, and also recommend that pelvic exams do not begin until age 21.

Cholesterol Screenings

Undesirable levels of cholesterol raise your risk of heart attack and stroke. A simple blood test can evaluate total cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, HDL cholesterol and triglycerides.

The USPSTF recommends that women aged 20 or older should have their cholesterol tested every four to six years. Screening frequency increases to every

one to two years once a woman is 45 through 65 years old. Some women may need more frequent testing if doctor recommended.

Colorectal Cancer Screening

Colorectal cancer screening tests detect cancerous cells and growths (polyps) that may become cancerous on the inside wall of your colon. Not everyone needs to be tested for colon cancer; your need for screening depends on your risk level. Three major factors influence your risk for colon cancer:

- You are age 45 or older.
- You have a family or personal history of colorectal cancer or adenomatous polyps.
- You have a personal history of inflammatory bowel disease.