

An Ounce Of Prevention Is Worth A Pound Of Cure

This old saying can be especially true when it comes to preventive health care. Maintaining or improving your health is important – and a focus on regular preventive care, along with the advice of your doctor, can help you stay healthy.



Routine checkups and screenings can help you avoid serious health problems, allowing you and your doctor to work as a team to manage your overall health, and help you reach your personal health and wellness goals. And there's no better time to schedule an annual checkup than Summer Break.

What Is Preventive Healthcare?

Preventive care focuses on maintaining your health and establishing your baseline health status. This may include immunizations, vaccines, physical evaluations, lab work, x-rays, and medically appropriate health screenings. During your preventive visit, your doctor will determine what tests or screenings are appropriate for you based on many factors such as your age, gender, overall health status, personal health history, and your current symptoms or chronic health concerns.

<p>TESTS BLOOD PRESSURE DIABETES CHOLESTEROL</p> 	<p>CANCER SCREENINGS MAMMOGRAMS AND COLONOSCOPIES</p> 	<p>INTERVENTION quit smoking lose weight eat healthy identify depression reduce alcohol use avoid sexually transmitted diseases</p> 	
<p>STD SCREENINGS SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS</p> 	<p>REGULAR VISITS WELL-WOMAN, WELL-BABY, AND WELL-CHILD</p> 	<p>CARE FOR HEALTHY PREGNANCIES</p> 	<p>VACCINATIONS FLU, PNEUMONIA, MEASLES, POLIO, MENINGITIS AND OTHER DISEASES</p>

Preventive care can help you avoid potentially serious health conditions and/or obtain early diagnosis and treatment. Generally, the sooner your doctor can identify and treat a medical condition, the better the outcome.

Why Are Preventive Screenings So Important?

Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, are responsible for 7 of every 10 deaths among Americans each year and account for 75% of the nation's health spending. These chronic diseases can be largely preventable through close partnership with your healthcare team, or can be detected through appropriate screenings, when treatment works best.

Eating healthy, exercising regularly, avoiding tobacco, and receiving preventive services such as cancer screenings, annual visits and vaccinations are just a few examples of ways people can stay healthy. The right preventive care at every stage of life helps all Americans stay healthy, avoid or delay the onset of disease, keep diseases they already have from becoming worse or debilitating, lead productive lives, and reduce costs.

What To Expect At A Preventive Screening?

The physical exam is an essential part of any doctor's visit. Surprisingly, though, there are no absolutes in a routine physical. A good doctor may be thorough or brief, but he or she will spend time listening to your concerns and providing counseling for your particular needs. Annual exams usually check your:

History. This is your chance to mention any complaints or concerns about your health. Your doctor will also likely quiz you about lifestyle behaviors like smoking, excessive alcohol use, sexual health, diet, and exercise. The doctor will also check on your vaccination status and update your personal and family medical history.

Vital Signs. These are some vital signs checked by your doctor:

- Blood pressure: Less than 120 over less than 80 is a normal blood pressure. Doctors define high blood pressure (hypertension) as 130 over 80 or higher.
- Heart rate: Values between 60 and 100 are considered normal. Many healthy people have heart rates slower than 60, however.

- Respiration rate: From 12 to 16 breaths per minute is normal for a healthy adult. Breathing more than 20 times per minute can suggest heart or lung problems.
- Temperature: 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit is the average, but healthy people can have resting temperatures slightly higher or lower.

General Appearance. Your doctor gathers a large amount of information about you and your health just by watching and talking to you. How is your memory and mental quickness? Does your skin appear healthy? Can you easily stand and walk?

Heart Exam. Listening to your heart with a stethoscope, a doctor might detect an irregular heartbeat, a heart murmur, or other clues to heart disease.

Lung Exam. Using a stethoscope, a doctor listens for crackles, wheezes, or decreased breath sounds. These and other sounds are clues to the presence of heart or lung disease.

Head and Neck Exam. Opening up and saying "ah" shows off your throat and tonsils. The quality of your teeth and gums also provides information about your overall health. Ears, nose, sinuses, eyes, lymph nodes, thyroid, and carotid arteries may also be examined.

Abdominal Exam. Your doctor can use a range of examination techniques including tapping your abdomen to detect liver size and presence of abdominal fluid, listening for bowel sounds with a stethoscope, and palpating for tenderness.

Neurological Exam. Nerves, muscle strength, reflexes, balance, and mental state may be assessed.

Dermatological Exam. Skin and nail findings could indicate a dermatological problem or disease somewhere else in the body.

Extremities Exam. Your doctor will look for physical and sensory changes. Pulses can be checked in your arms and legs. Examining joints can assess for abnormalities.

Laboratory Tests. There are no standard laboratory tests during an annual physical. However, some doctors will order certain tests routinely:

- Complete blood count
- Chemistry panel
- Urinalysis (UA)

Unless symptoms already suggest a problem, however, these tests are unlikely to provide useful information.

A screening lipid panel (cholesterol test) is recommended every 4 to 6 years, according to the American Heart Association. Your doctor might check more frequently if you have risk factors for heart disease. Abnormal cholesterol levels increase the risk for heart attacks and strokes.

If you are overweight or have any risk factors for diabetes, your blood sugar will likely be checked. The American Diabetes Association recommends that all adults, beginning at age 45, should be tested for diabetes -- regardless of weight.

Physicals Should Emphasize Prevention

The annual physical exam is a great opportunity to refocus your attention on prevention and screening:

- At age 50, it's time to begin regular screening for colorectal cancer. People with immediate family members with colorectal cancer or other risk factors may need to be screened before age 50.
- For some women, age 40 marks the time to begin annual mammogram screening for breast cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that **Women ages 40 to 44** should have the choice to start mammograms if they wish to do so. **Women age 45 to 54** should get mammograms every year while **women 55 and older** should switch to mammograms every 2 years, or can continue yearly screening. Women should talk to their doctor or other health care professional about when to start and how often to get a mammogram. Women should weigh the benefits and risks of screening tests when deciding whether to begin getting mammograms at age 40.

Healthy behaviors work far better than medicine at preventing illness, and don't require a prescription:

- Do 30 minutes of brisk walking or other exercise most days of the week (or about 150 minutes a week). And add in some strength training at least twice a week. Your risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer will fall dramatically.
- Eat a mostly plant-based diet, low in animal fats.

- Above all, don't smoke.

Are Preventive Screenings Really Free?

Many preventive services are 100 percent covered by insurance. But there's a chance that you may still be asked to pay after a visit for additional services.

It is important to make sure that you and your doctor are on the same page. Always ask what services your doctor is providing. What you pay will also depend on how he or she bills your health insurer.

- If a preventive screening uncovers something that could be serious, your doctor may order additional tests, schedule a follow up visit, or refer you to a specialist. The additional tests and follow-up may not be 100% covered.
- If a preventive screening uncovers something that your doctor says needs to be addressed right away, then that visit may switch from prevention to treatment – which also may not be covered 100%.
- In addition, if you see a doctor to diagnose, monitor, or treat an illness or injury, the visit is not considered preventive care. In these cases, your normal cost-sharing would apply (copayments, coinsurance, or deductible).

In any case, it's always a good idea to check with your insurance company ahead of time on the services that will be covered and to **make sure that you are seeing an in-network provider.**

What If I Don't Have A Primary Care Physician?

With so many changes in the healthcare market these days, it is understandable that one may find difficulty navigating their way through it all. The Joint Health Management Board (JHMB) believes that you shouldn't find it difficult to locate the right healthcare provider for you and your family when you need one.

In partnership with its key vendors, the JHMB has created quick guides to help you locate network providers for your medical, dental, vision, behavioral health, and chiropractic care benefits. When contacting a provider, be sure to have your insurance

card available – it contains plan information your provider will most likely need to answer your questions, including group number and network.

Visit <http://www.jhmbhealthconnect.com/locating-network-providers> for assistance in locating a network provider and schedule your preventive screening today!