

Women—Stay Healthy at Any Age: Checklist for Your Next Checkup

What can you do to stay healthy and prevent disease? You can get certain screening tests, take preventive medicine if you need it, and practice healthy behaviors.

Top health experts from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force suggest that when you go for your next checkup, talk to your doctor or nurse about how you can stay healthy no matter what your age.

Screening tests: what you need and when

Screening tests, such as mammograms and Pap smears, can find diseases early when they are easier to treat. Some women need certain screening tests earlier, or more often, than others. Talk to your doctor about which of the tests listed below are right for you, when you should have them, and how often.

The Task Force has made the following recommendations, based on scientific evidence, about which screening tests you should have.

- **Mammograms**—Have a mammogram every one to two years starting at age 40.
- **Pap smears**—Have a Pap smear every one to three years if you have been sexually active or are older than 21.
- **Cholesterol checks**—Have your cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 45. If you smoke, have diabetes, or if heart disease runs in your family, start having your cholesterol checked at age 20.
- **Blood pressure**—Have your blood pressure checked at least every two years.
- **Colorectal cancer tests**—Have a test for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. Your doctor can help you decide which test is right for you.
- **Diabetes tests**—Have a test to screen for diabetes if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol.
- **Depression**—If you've felt "down," sad or hopeless, and have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things for two weeks straight, talk to your doctor about whether he can screen you for depression.
- **Osteoporosis tests**—Have a bone density test at age 65 to screen for osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). If you are between the ages of 60 and

64 and weigh 154 lbs. or less, talk to your doctor about whether you should be tested.

- **Chlamydia tests and tests for other sexually transmitted diseases**—Have a test for chlamydia if you are 25 or younger and sexually active. If you are older, talk to your doctor to see whether you should be tested. Also, talk to your doctor to see whether you should be tested for other sexually transmitted diseases.

Should you take medicines to prevent disease?

- **Hormones**—According to recent studies, the risks of taking the combined hormones estrogen and progesterin after menopause to prevent long-term illnesses outweigh the benefits. Talk to your doctor about whether starting or continuing to take hormones is right for you.

- **Breast cancer drugs**—If your mother, sister or daughter has had breast cancer, talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits of taking medicines to prevent breast cancer.

- **Aspirin**—Talk to your doctor about taking aspirin to prevent heart disease if you are older than 45 and have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or if you smoke.

- **Immunizations**—Stay up-to-date with your immunizations:

- Have a flu shot every year starting at age 50.
- Have a tetanus-diphtheria shot every 10 years.
- Have a pneumonia shot once at age 65.
- Talk to your doctor to see whether you need hepatitis B shots.

What else can you do to stay healthy?

- **Don't smoke.** But if you do smoke, talk to your doctor about quitting. You can take medicine and get counseling to help you quit. Make a plan and set a quit date. Tell your family, friends and co-workers you are quitting. Ask for their support. If you are pregnant and smoke, quitting now will help you and your baby.

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Eat a variety of foods, including fruit, vegetables, animal or vegetable protein (such as meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu or tempeh) and grains (such as rice). Limit the amount of saturated fat you eat.

- **Be physically active.** Walk, dance, ride a bike, rake leaves or do any other physical activity you enjoy. Start small and work up to a total of 20 to 30 minutes most days of the week.

- **Stay at a healthy weight.** Balance the number of calories you eat with the

number you burn off by your activities. Remember to watch portion sizes. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about what or how much to eat.

• **Drink alcohol only in moderation.** If you drink alcohol, one drink a day is safe for women, unless you are pregnant. If you are pregnant, you should avoid alcohol. Since researchers don't know how much alcohol will harm a fetus, it's best not to drink any alcohol while you are pregnant. (A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.)

Screening test checklist

Take this checklist with you to your doctor's office and fill it out when you have had any of the tests listed below. Talk to your doctor about when you should have these tests next, and note the month and year in the right-hand column.

Also, talk to your doctor about which of the other tests listed below you should have in the future, and when you need them.

	The last time I had the following screening test was: (mm/yy)	I should schedule my next test for: (mm/yy)
Mammogram		
Pap smear		
Cholesterol		
Blood pressure		
Colorectal cancer		
Osteoporosis		
Chlamydia		

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality