



# MAKING SENSE OF WOMEN'S HEALTH TESTS AND SCREENINGS

Wondering which health screening tests and exams are right for you? Good for you! You're taking a big-picture, proactive approach to your health.

Screening tests are medical tests that look for signs of health problems before symptoms appear.

Some conditions, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol, raise your risk for heart disease and have few, if any, symptoms. Adhering to recommended routine health screenings, lab tests and preventive measures, such as immunizations, is just what the doctor ordered to help keep you healthy and catch potential problems early.

## Overview of recommended screenings and tests for women



**Overall and heart health.** Your primary care provider can look after your overall health, assess your risk for disease based on your personal and family history and make recommendations to lower the likelihood you will develop a serious disease. For example, a simple BMI calculation can tell you if you are overweight, raising your risk for joint, heart and other health problems. Periodic blood glucose testing will tell you if you have diabetes or prediabetes. Checking your blood pressure and cholesterol levels will alert you if you're at risk for a heart attack or stroke.



**Gynecological health.** Women have unique health needs related to reproduction. Every woman 21 and older should have periodic pelvic exams to check the health of their reproductive organs. If you're sexually active, your exams should include discussions about birth control and preventing sexually transmitted diseases. Women 65 and older should ask their doctors about bone density screening.



**Cancer screenings.** General cancer screening recommendations are for adults at average risk of developing cancer. Screening for cervical cancer begins at age 21 with Pap smears every three years (or HPV testing plus a Pap smear every five years, beginning at age 30).



Most screening guidelines recommend biannual breast cancer screening with mammograms between 50 and 74 and colon cancer screening beginning at age 50 (the frequency of screening depends on which test you use). Women 50 to 80 who have a history of heavy smoking may want to talk to their doctors about screening for lung cancer. If you do have risk factors, such as a personal or family history of cancer, your doctor may recommend a different screening schedule or even genetic testing.



**Immunizations.** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend an annual flu shot for adults, especially older adults or those at increased risk of complications from the flu. Older adults should be vaccinated for pneumonia and shingles around age 60 and receive a tetanus-diphtheria booster vaccine every 10 years. Ask your doctor if you are up to date on your other important immunizations.



**Mental health and domestic violence screenings.** Women are at higher risk for developing depression and being victims of domestic violence, particularly during and after pregnancy. Most healthcare providers screen patients for depression and intimate partner violence at every visit.

### Recommended Cancer Screenings for Women at *Average Risk of Cancer*

- ▶ **Breast cancer:** every two years ages 50 to 74—talk to your doctor about benefits and risks of screening before 50 and after 74
- ▶ **Colon cancer:** beginning at age 50—frequency depends on type of screening
- ▶ **Cervical cancer:** ages 21 to 65 with Pap smear every three years or HPV plus Pap every five years (ages 30 to 65)
- ▶ **Lung cancer:** 50 to 80 for individuals with a heavy smoking history and who are healthy enough to undergo curative treatment if needed



## Components of Women's Wellness

- ▶ Overall health (weight, nutrition, general lifestyle)
- ▶ Breast and gynecological health (including birth control and preventing sexually transmitted diseases)
- ▶ Vision and dental health
- ▶ Immunizations
- ▶ Screenings
  - Heart disease
  - Cancer
  - Diabetes
  - Bone density
  - Mental health
  - Domestic violence

### Recommended immunizations for adult women

- ▶ Annual flu shot
- ▶ Tetanus-diphtheria, at 19, with a booster every 10 years
- ▶ Shingles, age 60
- ▶ Pneumonia, age 65
- ▶ HPV vaccine, by age 26
- ▶ Hepatitis—ask your doctor if you're at risk