

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness segment. I'm Katie Johnson, and joining me as my guest today is Dr. Erin Peterson from the internal medicine department at Lake Region Healthcare. Good morning, Erin.

Dr. Peterson: Good morning, Katie.

Katie Johnson: I have asked Dr. Peterson to join us because Sunday we just celebrated Mother's Day. The National Women's Health Week is celebrated and kicked off on Mother's Day and National Health Check-up Day for Women is also part of this week, so I wanted to spend some time talking woman-to-woman about that thing that we sometimes have a hard time doing, and that's taking care of ourselves.

We're really good at taking care of others, our children, our spouses, our parents, depending on our age. We take care of a lot of other people, but aren't always so good at stopping to take care of ourselves. I wanted to talk about some ways that we can just take pause and think about how we could do a better job of doing that. To start out with, an annual physical is one way once a year we can stop and say, "I'm going to take some time to focus on my health with my provider."

Dr. Peterson: Exactly. An annual physical is recommended every year for all patients, regardless of if you're a man or a woman, a child or an adult. I oftentimes find that women become lax in getting their annual health maintenance evaluation, especially after they've had their children and they're busy and distracted with their day-to-day requirements for taking care of their family. I do recommend that once a year, all women see their doctor for a visit that's looking at preventative health issues, also screening for diseases that might already be present, but also looking for ways to prevent disease in the future.

Katie Johnson: If you look at it from that sense, I think that's a good perspective. Nothing has to be wrong. They don't have to be feeling that anything's wrong, "I'm taking a proactive approach to my health."

Dr. Peterson: Exactly. If you have a health problem, certainly you need to see your physician, but even if you think that you are 100% healthy with no problem, there are some things that we should be looking at every year to consider testing or vaccinations that you may be due for and other things that your physician may pick up on before you would ever have any symptom to make you personally concerned that there's a health problem there.

Katie Johnson: What are some of those kind of key screenings and ages?

Dr. Peterson: Okay. Starting out with an annual physical for women, we consider doing Pap smears and cervical cancer screening for all women over age 18. Other screening that we do on a regular basis for women is breast cancer screening. We can consider doing a mammogram for breast cancer screening at age 35 for a baseline,

and most women will start having routine breast cancer screening with mammograms on an every-1-to-2-year basis starting around age 40.

Another important part of the breast cancer screening is the actual physical exam where a physician feels for lumps and bumps, because not all cancers will show up on a mammogram. When doing a breast exam, it is important for women to include the tissue that goes all the way up into the armpit. We don't always think of that, but there is some breast tissue that goes into the armpit. I think it's also important for women, even if they're not doing breast exams where they're feeling for lumps and bumps, to at least spend some time standing in front of the mirror once a month looking at their appearance to make sure there's nothing obvious that's asymmetrical that hasn't been asymmetrical in the past.

Katie Johnson: Colonoscopies probably make the list of these wonderful-

Dr. Peterson: Yes.

Katie Johnson: ... screenings as well.

Dr. Peterson: They're probably the most dreaded tests-

Katie Johnson: I think so.

Dr. Peterson: ... judging from the conversations I have with my patients. Colonoscopies are recommended to start for most people, men or women, at age 50. Now if you have a family history of colon cancer in a first-degree relative, that would be your brothers, sisters, or your parents, we actually recommend doing the colonoscopy at an earlier age, perhaps 10 years before the age that your family member was diagnosed.

For the rest of the population, even if you have no history of colon cancer anywhere in your family, it is recommended to do colonoscopy or some other form of colon cancer screening starting at age 50. The other commonly-done screening test for women would be a bone density test. That's usually not started until women are menopausal, so usually age 65 is around the time we're looking at doing this test, which is an x-ray test.

Katie Johnson: Vaccinations are another important factor when you're having your annual exam as well.

Dr. Peterson: Yes, Katie. I believe that vaccinations do prevent a lot of diseases and make our country healthier. I do strongly recommend that all of my patients have an annual flu shot, unless they're allergic to flu shots or a component of that vaccination. I also recommend that all of my patients stay up to date with their tetanus shots, which typically need to be done every 10 years. For my older patients over age 60 and 65, pneumonia vaccinations and shingles vaccinations are recommended.

Katie Johnson: These are all great things that just take us one time every year, stop and do a little proactive work, but there's things that we can do every day, too, just to lead a healthier lifestyle one little bit at a time. Let's talk about some of those things. What makes your top list of things we can do day-to-day?

Dr. Peterson: Among women, I often find sleep deprivation to be a major health issue. In fact, many of the symptoms that women complain of, that they are concerned are due to a serious disease or illness, ultimately can be attributed to sleep deprivation, things like daily fatigue, muscle aches and pains. Even some depression and anxiety-type symptoms can certainly be worsened by lack of sleep.

Katie Johnson: What is adequate sleep?

Dr. Peterson: Adequate sleep varies for every person, but in general, it's going to be 7 to 8 hours of sleep at night. You have to listen to your body and what it's telling you, but at least 7 to 8 hours should be a goal for uninterrupted sleep time for most people.

Katie Johnson: I would imagine that nutrition and regular physical activity might make the list, too?

Dr. Peterson: Absolutely. Physical activity is so important for our cardiovascular fitness, also for our mental health. They've done studies that have shown people with anxiety or depression show some similar benefits to physical activity as to taking a medicine for anxiety or depression. I think it's something we really need to prescribe ourselves for our emotional and physical health.

Women oftentimes are frustrated about exercise when they're trying to lose weight. Sometimes I think women become discouraged when they're exercising and they don't see the scale reflecting weight loss. I encourage people not to tie physical activity just to weight loss but to general health and things that aren't as easily measured. I do recommend 15 to 30 minutes, if not more, of sustained medium-intensity physical activity most days. Something like walking would be fine.

Katie Johnson: Other everyday things that might make your top list?

Dr. Peterson: I think a low-carb diet is really important in America. Growing up, our parents and our grandparents working on farms and doing manual labor, they really did need to eat a lot of carbohydrates because they were burning thousands of calories a day, but most of us have relatively sedentary lifestyles. Not to say that we're lazy and we're not working hard, but most of our jobs involve standing in one place or sitting for large periods of time.

Our daily caloric needs, the number of calories we need to consume in a day, just are not the same as what it was for our parents and grandparents. For most of us, we're not overdosing on the vegetables or the fruits or the lean, healthy protein. For most of us it's the carbohydrates, the sweets, potatoes, pastas, and bread that

are our biggest downfall for gaining fat and weight that we don't want.

Katie Johnson: Any other last items you want to make sure we throw out there as tips to women who we're encouraging to stop and just take better care of themselves?

Dr. Peterson: I think you kind of said it with the stop and take better care of yourself. One of the things that women, I think all of us, men and women, do is we don't always take time for ourselves out of our busy day. I encourage people to try to find even just 10 minutes of quiet time that they can reserve for themselves, whether it's to read one chapter of a book, to watch one portion of a favorite TV show, to go for that walk, to take that warm bath, some activity that each individual identifies as being relaxing and a reward for themselves and a time to kind of re-center and sometimes let down from the stresses that have built up throughout the day.

Katie Johnson: I think it's just really interesting how things like that can have such a powerful impact on our actual physical health.

Dr. Peterson: Absolutely. We spend a lot of time thinking about what tests doctors should do and what medications we should be prescribed and trying to find out what diseases are wrong with us, but oftentimes we should probably spend more of our focus on what simple things can we do on a daily basis to just keep our bodies going in a healthy manner, like the sleep, the healthy, nutritious diet, and taking time to de-stress throughout the day.

Katie Johnson: Thank you so much for those tips to help us do just that. As we said, during National Women's Health Week, I encourage every woman listening today to stop and really think about some of the advice that Dr. Peterson shared with us about getting your annual exams and your annual screenings, but also doing those everyday things, sleeping, eating right, low-carb diet, moving a few minutes every day, and taking a little time for yourself. Thanks for that great advice and for sharing your time with us this morning, Dr. Peterson.

Dr. Peterson: Thanks for having me, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Dr. Erin Peterson along with Katie Johnson reminding you that there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.