

Specialists and Tests

FOR WOMEN

by the Decade

As we age, the list of preventative measures necessary to ensure good health into old age grows. Compared to men, women face particularly complicated health issues throughout life – from preparing for pregnancy to transitioning through menopause.

Below is a guide to all the basic health recommendations for a healthy woman in her **20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s**. If you have a family history of disease or suffer from a chronic health issue, your doctor may recommend these tests more often. It's also important to stay vigilant to your body. Contact your doctor if you're concerned about anything that is abnormal for you.

Adhering to these guidelines – in addition to receiving an annual physical examination – won't guarantee perfect health. But it will give you the best chance at detecting a condition early.

In Your 20s

Appointment & Screening Schedule:

OB/GYN

Pelvic exams and Pap smears – every three years if normal, more often if abnormal, to screen for cervical cancer

STD screenings – every year that you're sexually active with more than one partner

Primary care physician

Blood pressure tests – every two years if normal, more often if abnormal

Cholesterol tests – every five years if normal, more often if abnormal

Fasting glucose tests – every two to three years if normal, more often if abnormal

Dermatologist

Body scan – once a year (more often if indicated by the doctor) to detect signs of skin cancer

Dentist

Examination and cleaning – every six months

Discussion Points:

Diet

Be sure to discuss your diet with your primary care doctor, as well as tips on how to maintain a healthy weight.

Birth control

Most women at this stage are interested in finding a birth control that is right for them. Ask your OB/GYN which method will best fit your lifestyle and what risks and side-effects are associated with each type.

In Your 30s

Appointment & Screening Schedule:

OB/GYN

Pelvic Exams and Pap smears – every three years (if normal)

HPV test – with Pap test, every five years

Primary care physician

Blood pressure, cholesterol and fasting glucose tests – every two years if normal, more often if abnormal

Thyroid stimulating hormone test (TSH) – at age 35, then every few years after that, to check for an underactive or overactive thyroid

Dermatologist

Body scan – once a year (more often if indicated by the doctor) to detect signs of skin cancer

Dentist

Examination and cleaning – every six months

Discussion Points:

Babies

More women are waiting until their 30s to conceive. Ask your OB/GYN if you are in proper health to conceive, how to determine when you're ovulating, and what your options are if you have trouble getting pregnant.

Vaccinations

Check with your primary care doctor that your immunizations are up-to-date. Your last round of vaccinations may have been when you started college. Every ten years, update your vaccinations for tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis, or whooping cough.

In Your 40s

Appointment & Screening Schedule:

OB/GYN

Pelvic Exams and Pap smears – every three years (if normal)

HPV test – with Pap test, every five years

Mammogram – the latest recommendation is for women to wait until 45, unless there's a family history of breast cancer. After that, it's recommended every year

Primary care physician

Blood pressure, cholesterol and fasting glucose tests – every two years if normal, more often if abnormal

Thyroid stimulating hormone test (TSH) – at least one time during your 40s, to check for an underactive or overactive thyroid

Dermatologist

Body scan – once a year (more often if indicated by the doctor) to detect signs of skin cancer

Dentist

Examination and cleaning – every six months

Mouth cancer screening – an examination of your mouth for any signs of possible mouth cancer, which is more likely to strike after age 40

Discussion Points:

Birth control

Some birth control pills can elevate your risk of heart disease or stroke. This may be the time to talk to your OB/Gyn about alternative birth control measures.

Bone loss

Peak bone mass is between 25 to 30. Exercise and nutrition will help keep health bone mass at this age.

Cancer screenings

This is the age when women will start to develop breast, cervical, ovarian, colon, and endometrial cancer, so gynecological exams every three years and yearly mammograms are essential. Ask your doctor about how to perform a breast self-exam in between annual mammograms.

In Your 50s

Appointment & Screening Schedule:

OB/GYN

Pelvic Exams and Pap smears – every three years (if normal)

HPV test – with Pap test, every five years

Mammogram – every year. Women over 55 and with no history can switch to once every two years

Primary care physician

Blood pressure, cholesterol and fasting glucose tests – every two years if normal, more often if abnormal

Thyroid stimulating hormone test (TSH) – at least one time during your 50s, to check for an underactive or overactive thyroid

Bone density test – if you have risk factors for bone loss, you can start this test in your 50s

Dermatologist

Body scan – once a year (more often if indicated by the doctor) to detect signs of skin cancer

Dentist

Examination and cleaning – every six months

Mouth cancer screening – an examination of your mouth for any signs of possible mouth cancer, which is more likely to strike after age 40

Gastroenterologist

Colonoscopy – every ten years; your primary care physician will refer you to a gastroenterologist for a rectal screening

Discussion Points:

Menopause

Be sure to discuss the signs of menopause with your doctor, and whether you should consider hormone replacement therapy or another treatment for your symptoms.

Bone loss

Bone loss starts to speed up after menopause. Although bone density tests are not typically recommended under the age of 60, you may want to discuss with your doctor whether you're at a high risk for osteoporosis and should be tested earlier.

Colorectal cancers

Women in their 50s face an increased risk of colorectal cancer. Be sure to discuss your diet and lifestyle with your doctor.

For 65+

Appointment & Screening Schedule:

OB/GYN

Pelvic Exams and Pap smears – every 3 years (if normal). If you've had a history of negative pap-smears or had a total hysterectomy, your doctor may tell you a Pap test is no longer needed.

Mammogram – every year. Breast cancer risk increases with age, so it's important to keep going for your annual mammogram.

Primary care physician

Blood pressure, cholesterol and fasting glucose tests – every 2 years if normal, more often if abnormal. At this age, you can also ask for an advanced lipid tests, which provides additional information on cardiovascular health.

Vaccinations – Make sure regular vaccines are up to date. Your doctor may also recommend the pneumonia and shingles vaccine, as well as annual flu shots.

Thyroid stimulating hormone test (TSH) – The American Thyroid Association recommends screening every 5 years to check for an underactive or overactive thyroid

Bone density – Now is the time to worry about osteoporosis. Your doctor may screen you every 2 years.

Dermatologist

Body scan – once a year (more often if indicated by the doctor) to detect signs of skin cancer

Dentist

Examination and cleaning – every six months

Mouth cancer screening – an examination of your mouth for any signs of possible mouth cancer and gum disease

Gastroenterologist

Colonoscopy – every ten years; your primary care physician will refer you to a gastroenterologist for a rectal screening.

Additional Screenings

Ophthalmologist – At this age, there's an increased risk for macular degeneration, cataracts and glaucoma. Visit your optometrist and talk to her about how often you need your eyes checked.

Audiologist – Over 25% of adults aged 65-74 having hearing loss that is treatable. Visit an audiologist to get your hearing checked.

Discussion Points:

Unfortunately, at this age, muscle starts converting to fat and can quickly migrate to your waist. On top of that, your metabolism slows. Keep your diet in check and stay active.

Arthritis affects almost 50 percent of adults over 65. Talk to your doctor about how you can manage arthritis to stay active and enjoy the activities you love.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in adults over 65. Keep an eye on risk factors and make lifestyle changes that can reduce your chances of heart disease.