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Preventive Services for Healthy Living

How can my doctor help me stay healthy?

In addition to treating you when you are sick, your doctor can follow a program designed to help you stay healthy. This program tells the doctor which preventive services you need depending on your age, medical history and family history.

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What is a "preventive service"?

A preventive service might be a test, or it might be advice from your doctor. Preventive services can include the following:

- Tests (also called screenings) to check your general health or the health of certain parts of your body
- Regular measurements of weight, cholesterol levels and blood pressure
- Advice about diet, exercise, tobacco, alcohol and drug use, stress and accident prevention
- Immunizations ("shots") for both children and adults
- Special tests at certain times in your life, such as during pregnancy and after age 50

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Will my doctor tell me which preventive services I need?

Yes. Follow your doctor's advice about checkups, about healthy lifestyle choices and about medicines that prevent health problems, such as blood pressure medicine. Preventive services are sometimes offered in your community (for example, blood pressure tests at the local shopping center). If you're not sure you need the service being offered, ask your doctor.

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Who pays for preventive services?

Most health insurance companies pay for at least some preventive services. If you aren't sure what preventive services your insurance covers, read your health plan's patient manual or call the health plan's office.

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What preventive services do women need?

Adult women should have their weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels checked regularly. They should also have a Pap test at least every 3 years to screen for cervical cancer starting at age 21 or approximately 3 years after they have sex for the first time. After the age of 50, women should have a mammogram every 2 years to screen for breast cancer. Women who have risk factors for breast cancer, such as a family history of breast cancer, may need to have mammograms more often or start having them sooner. After the age of 50, women should be tested for colorectal cancer. These are routine tests that everyone should have. If your doctor orders these tests for you, it does not mean he or she thinks you have cancer. Your doctor will also make sure you have all the shots you need.

Your doctor may give you advice about exercise and diet. For example, your doctor may tell you how much calcium you need to prevent bone problems, or he or she may talk to you about taking folic acid before you get pregnant and lowering the fat and cholesterol in your diet. Your doctor may also give you advice about alcohol and drug use and sexually transmitted infections. As you get close to menopause, your doctor will talk to you about hormone replacement therapy. Your doctor may also talk to you about injury prevention practices, such as using seat belts and having smoke detectors in your home.

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What preventive services do men need?

Adult men should have their weight, cholesterol levels and blood pressure checked regularly. Men older than 50 should be tested for colorectal cancer. If your doctor orders this test, it does not mean he or she thinks you have cancer. This is a routine test that everyone should have. Your doctor will also make sure you have all the shots you need.

Your doctor may talk to you about the importance of diet and exercise, testing for prostate cancer and avoiding alcohol, tobacco, drugs and sexually transmitted infections. Your doctor may also talk to you about injury prevention practices, such as using seat belts and having smoke detectors in your home.

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What preventive services do children need?

Shots are one of the most important preventive services for children. Shots (also called vaccines) protect children from diseases such as polio, measles and mumps.

A note about vaccines

Sometimes the amount of a certain vaccine cannot keep up with the number of people who need it. [More info...](#)

Your doctor will check your child to make sure he or she is growing and developing properly. Your doctor will tell you what you can do to keep your child's teeth healthy. Your doctor may also give you advice about how to keep your child safe from accidents and injuries (for example, using car seats and seat belts and keeping your child away from poisons and electric outlets). Your doctor will also talk to you about teaching your child healthy eating habits and exercise habits. Your doctor can tell you how to teach your child about the dangers of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. You can also ask your doctor for tips on how to talk to an older child about avoiding pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and AIDS.

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What can I do to keep myself healthy?

The choices you make about the way you live are important to your health. Here are some choices you can make to help yourself stay healthy:

- Don't use any form of tobacco.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise regularly.
- Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.
- Don't use illegal drugs.
- Practice safe sex.
- Use seat belts (and car seats for children) when riding in a car or truck.
- See your doctor regularly for preventive care.

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Other Organizations

- [U.S. Surgeon General's My Family Health Portrait](https://familyhistory.hhs.gov)
<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov>

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