

THE CHECKUP CHECKLIST

Ready to go next-level with your health? Here's everything you need to know to get the most out of your annual doctor visits.

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Keep your own notes throughout the year to bring to your exam.

THE MOST IMPORTANT health decision you'll ever make might surprise you; it's simply to take charge. Even if you're blessed with good doctors and great genes (and you eat well, check, and exercise regularly, double check), seeing your doctor for a yearly exam and the right blood work is key—as is knowing what tests to get and what you may be at risk for. The good news: You can be proactive. We've made it easy for every age.

IN YOUR
20s

What's happening: You're at your optimal health; the goal now is to keep it that way. This is the time to set yourself up for the decades to come—start healthy eating habits, and get at least 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise.

Biggest risks: Melanoma is one of the most common cancers in young women, so be on the lookout for any changes on your skin. Also important: STD testing and prevention, says Mary Jane Minkin, M.D., a clinical professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive sciences at the Yale School of Medicine. Not only can STDs cause problems now, but chlamydia and gonorrhea, left untreated, can lead to infertility, too.

Key tests and vaccines: The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists recommends a Pap test every three years. The United States Preventive Service Task Force suggests that women with a family history of cancer should discuss being screened for breast-cancer susceptibility genes BRCA1 or BRCA2 after the age of 18. Starting at age 20, the American Heart Association recommends cholesterol testing every four to six years.

**TOP STAY-HEALTHY TIPS****Ban tanning, period.**

Just one trip to a tanning salon can increase your risk of melanoma by 20 percent, warns Amy Wechsler, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, in Brooklyn.

Get 1,200 milligrams of calcium daily.

It will give you stronger bones, as will weight-bearing exercise.

Don't get lax about your contact lenses.

Wearing them for longer than prescribed can lead to serious infections.

IN YOUR
30s

What's happening: Period issues, pregnancy, and self-care are hallmarks of this decade. Fertility begins to decrease around age 35, so it can be more difficult (and take longer) to get pregnant.

Biggest risks: Cancer rises to become the most common cause of death at age 35 (through age 84). While colonoscopies aren't recommended until age 50, "if you pass any blood in your stool, go see a doctor for screening," says Patricia Raymond, a gastroenterologist in Virginia Beach and a fellow at the American College of Gastroenterology. "Don't assume it's hemorrhoids—it could be the first sign of rectal cancer."

Key tests and vaccines: An annual flu shot is suggested (even if you're pregnant or breastfeeding). Now is also a good time for a Tdap booster (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis). If you don't see a dermatologist for annual skin-cancer screenings, start now. Continue with Pap and HPV testing every five years.

**TOP STAY-HEALTHY TIPS****Get at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily.**

This is vital for early fetal development, and studies show it's best to start taking it at least a month before you get pregnant.

Give your eyes a rest.

After every 20 minutes of computer work, look up and focus on a spot 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

Do breast self-exams.

While some doctors don't recommend them, others argue that they help patients detect changes.

IN YOUR
40s

What's happening: "Perimenopause can start up to 10 years before you stop having periods," says Minkin. So don't be surprised if you notice changes in your cycle (longer, shorter, heavier, lighter).

Biggest risks: Cancers of all kinds are the leading cause of death among women in their 40s, so stay on top of your annual checkups.

Key tests and vaccines: Continue getting your annual flu shots. Ask your doctor if you should have a mammogram. The guidelines are in flux, but the American Cancer Society says women ages 40 to 44 should have the choice to have a mammogram, and recommends them annually for those of average risk between 45 and 54. Age 40 is also when you should have a comprehensive eye exam, to check not just your vision but the overall health of your eyes, says Rebecca Taylor, M.D., clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology, in Nashville. If you're African-American, the American College of Gastroenterology recommends beginning colonoscopies at 45.

**TOP STAY-HEALTHY TIPS****Get 1,000 milligrams of calcium and 600 IUs of vitamin D daily.**

This keeps bones strong as you head toward menopause.

Don't be cavalier about birth control.

You can still get pregnant.

Do Kegel exercises regularly.

Three sets of 10 every day will help incontinence issues.

IN YOUR
50s

What's happening: Welcome to menopause—on average it kicks in at age 51, and once you've gone a full year without a period, you've officially reached that milestone. Menopause brings about a host of changes, mostly driven by shifting hormone levels. These range from bone loss and hot flashes to mood swings and depression. All are totally normal.

Biggest risks: Cancer continues to be the highest risk, but heart-disease incidence in women rises dramatically after age 55.

Key tests and vaccines: At 50, schedule your first colonoscopy (if you haven't had one sooner because of other risk factors). Also, be sure to have annual cholesterol checks, and, if you have any risk factors for osteoporosis, get a baseline bone-density test two years after your last period. If you were born between 1945 and 1965, the CDC recommends a one-time test for hepatitis C.

**TOP STAY-HEALTHY TIPS****Keep doing weight-bearing and strengthening exercises.**

They're important for bone health and for maintaining muscle mass as you age; check with your doctor for specific recommendations that take into account any underlying conditions you may have.

Focus on sleep.

Menopausal symptoms can interfere with a good night's rest, so it's even more crucial now to set the stage each night for relaxation—keep your room dark and cool, banish tablets and TV, and try a calming pre-bed practice, like meditation or breathing exercises.

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IN YOUR 60s

What's happening: This is a big transition decade. Mental and physical declines don't have to be a normal part of aging, and many health problems can be staved off—or avoided entirely—if you continue to make eating right and exercise a priority.

Biggest risks: Osteoporosis and eye diseases (like cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration) are more prevalent during these decades. Also, keep a closer eye on blood pressure and cholesterol, since heart disease increases after the age of 55 and is a leading cause of death in women over 65.

Key tests and vaccines: See an ophthalmologist for regular eye exams. The shingles vaccine is recommended at age 60, and the pneumonia vaccine at 65. After 55, you can choose to get mammograms every two years, and, depending on your history, you may be able to discontinue Pap tests. Get a bone-density screening at 65 if you hadn't had one yet. Keep up with colonoscopies.



TOP STAY-HEALTHY TIPS

Stay social.

Studies have shown that loneliness is associated with increased mortality risk, so keep an active calendar.

Eat a heart- (and brain-) healthy diet.

Think plant-based foods, and include healthy sources of fat (like avocados, nuts, and salmon).

IN YOUR 70s

What's happening: "This is still considered middle-aged by most geriatricians," says Jan Busby-Whitehead, board chair of the Health and Aging Foundation. Our early-to-mid-70s aren't that much different from our 60s, but there are subtle changes to our bodies that begin to happen in this decade. And they're really different for everyone. "As you get older, your health becomes more heterogeneous," says Busby-Whitehead.

Biggest risks: There are four concerns. Heart disease and cancers are the biggest, as they're the leading causes of death in women 75 to 84; the other two are stroke and chronic lower-respiratory disease. You may also start to feel more general wear and tear on your body, and arthritis may flare up.

Key tests and vaccines: Many of the same ones you had in your 60s will continue: bone-density and cholesterol tests, eye exams, and mammograms. If you haven't had any colon polyps, you may consider stopping colonoscopies at age 76. Get hearing tests every year. And if you haven't been getting the high-dose flu shot, start doing it now—it has four times the amount of antigen.



TOP STAY-HEALTHY TIPS

Plan ahead.

"It's far better to think about things before a crisis occurs," says Busby-Whitehead. This includes where you want to live and an advance-directive form in case you do get sick.

Keep working out.

Strength training helps keep muscles strong, assists balance, and boosts your mood.

Learn something new.

This is the best way to exercise your mind.