

When to Get Preventive Exams?

By: Dr. Kim Lazarus, DC

Living a healthy long life is what most people want. The question lies in how to make sure we stay healthy so we can live longer. Prevention is always the best cure for all ailments.

Prevention against disease comes from health checkups and preventive exams. It is important to get health exams on a regular basis. But it's difficult to know what type of exam and at what age to get the exam if you don't check in with your doctor on a regular basis.

If done in a timely manner, preventive exams can detect health problems early before serious health conditions arise. If detected early, most likely the problem can be treated effectively.

Types of preventive procedures include lab tests such as cholesterol, blood sugar, calcium, hepatitis, complete blood count, thyroid, red blood cell, urinalysis, pap smears, PSA, and screening for sexually transmitted diseases.

Exams include breast, colorectal, pelvic, prostate, dental, eye, skin, and self-exams.

Imaging exams include mammograms, colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, ultrasound, x-ray, bone density, MRI, cat scans, and ECG/EKG's.

All screening exams should include basic health tests, which include a healthy weight determination, a blood pressure check, and the tests that are appropriate for your age and health condition.

The National Institute of Health recommends the following tests for heart health: cholesterol, LDL, an HDL levels checked every 5 years, or more often if they are high; fasting fat levels of triglycerides and glucose levels; blood pressure; and health counseling regarding a fitness program, diet, substance abuse, depression and other healthy lifestyle issues.

The American Cancer Society recommends the following screening tests:

Cervix

(Female-age 18+) Pap test and pelvic exam annually, after 3 or more consecutive normal tests then tests may be performed less frequently as suggested by your physician.

Breast

(Female-age 20+) Clinical breast exams every 3 years.

(Female-age 40+) Clinical breast exams yearly including a mammogram.

Cancer Related
(Female & male-
age 20+)

Health exams to check skin, ovary, oral cavity, thyroid, lymph nodes, testicular, diet, sun exposure, nutrition, weight control, sexual practices, and occupational exposures. These exams should be performed at least every 3 years up to age 40 then annually.

Prostate
(Male age 50+)

Digital rectal exam and a PSA test performed annually.

Colorectal
(Female & male-
age 50+)

Fecal occult blood test with rectal exam and one of the following: sigmoidoscopy, barium enema x-ray, or colonoscopy. These tests are either performed annually, every 5 years, or every 10 years.

Preventive Exam Schedule includes:

Blood Pressure
(Age 18+)

Both male and female should be checked every 2 years with the recommended range 120/80.

Blood Tests
(Age 20+)

To be performed every 5 years if within normal limits. Tests include cholesterol and calcium as part of routine check up.

Blood Sugar
(Age 45 or
high risk)

(FPG) Fasting Plasma Glucose performed or (OGTT) Oral Glucose Tolerance Test every 3 years.

RBC Red
Blood Cell
Count

During pregnancy or suspected health condition.

Thyroid
(Age 50+)

Every 5 years.

Hepatitis

As indicated by your physician.

Dental
(Age 3+)

Annually up to age 65. Every 6 months after age 65.

Electro-
Cardiogram
(Age 40+)

To be determined by doctor.

Eye Exam
(Age 20+)

Every 2-4 years between ages 40-64.
Every 1-2 year 65 and older.

Bone Mineral
Density Test
(Age 65+)

Frequency determined by physician.

Sexually
Transmitted
Diseases (STD)

Frequency depends on number of partners.

Skin Exam
(Age 20+)

Every 3 years between ages 20-39.
Annually age 40 and older.

Urinalysis

As needed and determined by physician based on symptoms.

Another area of recommended procedures is immunizations. The topic of immunizations can be quite controversial especially in my field. I am not writing this article to express any personal points of view but I am merely stating medical protocols that are recommended to maintain health.

Tetanus shots are recommended every 10 years for adults. Pneumonia vaccinations are recommended for age 65 and older and repeated every ten years or as prescribed by your physician.

Flu vaccinations are encouraged annually for adults 65 and older or any adult whom chooses to avoid getting the flu.

Hepatitis vaccines are recommended for those who will be traveling to certain countries where transmission is a concern.

All of these health protocols are suggested in practicing preventive medicine. Recently I have heard of several cases in which lives have been saved due to screening exams. Don't take risks with your health. Do not wait until symptoms arise before getting a check-up. Prevention can lead to a healthier and longer life.

As a preventative health care practitioner I want everyone to lead a healthy long life. Take my advice and get those screening tests.

Kim Lazarus is a local chiropractor and the co-owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center.