

**THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTH SCREENINGS**

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Some people approach health-care issues with the idea, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” But this attitude isn’t effective when it comes to maintaining good health and well-being. To perform at their best, people need routine care and regular health checkups. Health screenings should be a regular part of your health maintenance routine. Screenings can identify health issues early when it is often easier to treat, manage and even cure some illnesses. Without early diagnosis, many conditions can lead to long-term health consequences for patients. Many fatal or difficult health conditions can be present for years before related symptoms are felt.

The reasons many patients give for avoiding potentially life-saving tests are the expense, pain and discomfort associated with them. However, many conditions can be caught via simple tests, and cer-

tainly the momentary discomfort associated with more invasive tests is preferable to a diagnosis of disease advanced past the point of easy treatment.

In their 20s and 30s, many patients believe that they are too young to suffer serious illnesses and so forgo annual screenings. This may jeopardize their health, as there are many conditions that are more common in this age range. One such condition is skin cancer, especially melanoma, which is more common in patients in their 20s to early 40s than it is in patients who are later in life. According to the American Cancer Society, nearly 70,000 new cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the United States annually, making it one of the most common cancers. It is a condition where early detection is crucial, especially for melanomas. Once the disease has spread, it becomes

much more difficult to treat. Your doctor may recommend an annual screening, where he or she will examine your skin for suspicious spots or growths.

As we get older, the number of important screenings increases. The good news is, many of these tests are very low-stress and easy to complete. Your annual physical will most likely include blood tests, which typically will include cholesterol tests, as well as tests for liver and kidney function, anemia and other conditions. Women will need to undergo a clinical breast exam, Pap test and mammogram, while men will need to have a PSA blood test for prostate cancer.

Eye screenings are important for catching a number of illnesses. Glaucoma is one such condition, where an increase in the pressure inside the eye slowly leads to blindness, but the damage occurs so gradually it usually is often not noticed until it has reached an advanced stage. An eye exam will also check for other problems, such as cataracts and macular degeneration, many of which can be treated if caught early enough.

Starting at the age of 50, and younger for patients with family history, it is recommended that patients have a colonoscopy. Many patients say the preparation in anticipation of the test is worse than the actual experience, but the process is finished in the course of a day. You will be given a mild sedative during the experience, and it is usually over in about 30 minutes. Also, colonoscopies can reduce your future risk of colorectal cancer, as precancerous polyps that are easily removed during the course of a normal colonoscopy will not have the chance to develop into cancers.

These are a few of the many tests that your physician may recommend for you to undergo, depending on your family history of disease, lifestyle and other risk factors. The important part in protecting your health is starting the conversation by visiting a physician.



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