

Health Checks for Women

Regular health checks and screenings in combination with a healthy diet and regular physical activity can assist in the prevention of disease or illness and ensure you are aware of possible health risks during different life stages. For this reason it is important to have a check-up with your general practitioner (GP) every year to assess your physical and mental health. Regular check-ups with other health professionals (e.g. dentist) are also important. There are also additional medical checks that are recommended during different life stages.

The complete range of medical checks and screening procedures required throughout life will vary for every person, depending on individual risks, medical background and family history. Talk to your GP about what tests *you* require to maintain *your* health.

Regular health checks should include the following:

- skin examination – screening for skin cancer
- physical examination including blood pressure, height and weight, waist measurement every two years
- pap smear – all women aged 18-70 who have ever been sexually active (includes genital-skin to genital-skin contact) should have a pap test every two years
- Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) check prior to new sexual relationships/partners
- 'breast awareness' (being familiar with the normal look and feel of your breasts)
- oral/dental health check – dental examination and cleaning every year
- mental health check with your GP if you are experiencing symptoms, such as anxiety, irritability or sadness

Additional tests for different life stages

Under 30

- blood cholesterol, triglyceride (fat) and blood glucose (sugar) check – may be required based on risks
- chlamydia test every year if sexually active and aged 15-25 or older if at risk (can be done during pap smear or urine test on alternate years)
- for pre-conception planning:
 - o reproductive health check including a detailed history and examination looking for factors which may impact on the health of mother or baby such as genetic or medical conditions, medications or substance abuse
 - o immunisation review (e.g. immunisation for whooping cough, rubella, human papillomavirus (HPV))

30s

- blood cholesterol, triglyceride (fat) and blood glucose (sugar) check – may be required based on risks
- chlamydia test if at risk
- for pre-conception planning:
 - o reproductive health check (see above for under 30s)
 - o immunisation review (e.g. immunisation for whooping cough, rubella, human papillomavirus (HPV))

40s

- '45-49 year old health check' – a free once only check with your GP for those at risk of developing a chronic disease
- bone health review for osteoporosis (includes history, examination, risk factor evaluation, +/- tests)
- blood cholesterol, triglyceride (fat) and blood glucose (sugar) check – frequency based on risks
- for pre-conception planning (see above for under 30s)
- mammogram if family history of breast cancer, otherwise 'breast awareness'

- bowel cancer screening every two years if there is a family history
- regular eye examination

50s and 60s

- bone health review for osteoporosis (includes history, examination, risk factor evaluation, +/- tests)
- blood cholesterol, triglyceride (fat) and blood glucose (sugar) check – frequency based on risks
- mammogram every two years and 'breast awareness'
- bowel cancer screening every two years (+/- colonoscopy based on risks)
- eye examination (every year after age 65)
- hearing test (every year after age 65)
- urine test every year to assess kidney health +/- blood test
- ovarian cancer screening if at risk and experiencing symptoms of the condition
- immunisation review (e.g. immunisation for tetanus, whooping cough, flu and pneumonia)

70s and beyond

- '75+ year old health check' – a free annual health assessment for people aged 75 years and older
- bone health review for osteoporosis (includes history, examination, risk factor evaluation, +/- tests)
- blood cholesterol, triglyceride (fat) and blood glucose (sugar) check – frequency based on risks
- mammogram every two years (recommended up to 70) and 'breast awareness'
- bowel cancer screening every two years (+/- colonoscopy based on risks)
- hearing test every year
- eye examination every year
- urine test every year to assess kidney health +/- blood test
- falls risk assessment/evaluation
- immunisation review every year
- dementia screening

How to make the most out of your health practitioner's appointment

Be prepared

Try to be clear about what you want from the appointment and focus on the key issues. If you have several issues, book an extended appointment.

Bring relevant information

Take a list of questions you may have, any relevant documentation, family medical history and current medication list.

Take notes

Writing down key points can help you remember what you want to say and what was discussed during the appointment.

Ask questions

Ask questions in order of priority and relevance. You may not be able to get answers to everything you want to know in one consultation. Don't be afraid to ask tricky or sensitive questions regarding your health, your health practitioner is there to help you and it is unlikely that anything you say will surprise them.

Bring someone with you

Bringing a friend or family member with you may be helpful for support.

Follow Up

Another appointment may be required for follow up when there are issues that need further investigation, discussion, tests or examination.

Useful Resources

- www.jeanhailles.org.au - Jean Hailles for Women's Health
- www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au - Better Health Channel
- www.heartfoundation.org.au - The Heart Foundation
- www.diabetesaustralia.com.au - Diabetes Australia
- www.cancer.org.au - Cancer Council Australia
- www.osteoporosis.com.au - Osteoporosis Australia
- www.beyondblue.org.au - Beyondblue, the national depression initiative
- www.hearing.com.au - Australian Hearing

This resource was developed with the support of the Australian Department of Health and Ageing

This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner.

Updated August 2011