

Health checks – start the year right

Having cheerfully waved goodbye to 2020, a year most of us would want to forget, we can finally turn our attention to a new beginning in 2021. The vaccine rollout is just weeks away and the despair we have felt for so many months has cautiously been replaced by hope.

We are seizing the new day, rushing to embrace ambitious new year's resolutions – running a marathon or quickly shedding the COVID kilos – but many, if not most of us, will fall short.

However, there's one resolution that's both achievable and potentially lifesaving, not just for now but for the future. We can reset the new year by catching up on our health checks.

We know that a lot of women put off vital health checks last year, or couldn't find the time for them. According to our 2020 National Women's Healthy Survey, one in five (21.5%) women said they did not have enough time to attend appointments for health checks; women aged 25-44 found it hardest to find the time (31.7%), compared with only 1.7% among those aged 75 or older.

Always on the lookout

"Health checks are one of the most important ways you can take care of your body and your health," says Jean Hailes Specialist Women's Health GP, Dr Amanda Newman. "Health checks are an excellent way to assess your current state of health, but they are also very useful in protecting your future health."

Health checks not only help your doctor diagnose health conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes, they can also reveal early warning signs of several other conditions.

"Cancer screening tests, for example, look for any changes and early signs of the disease," says Dr Newman. "The tests can pick up things before the cancer has even developed and before you are experiencing any of the symptoms."

"In this way, a health check can be the first step in doing something about a health issue before it really becomes an issue."

What health checks do you need and how often?

The type and timing of health checks depend on many factors: your age, medical background, individual risk factors and family history. Your GP will be able to guide you through which tests are recommended for your specific needs and how often you may need them.

"Some of the common health checks for women include heart health checks (blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index), blood sugar tests for diabetes, mammograms

for breast health, cervical screening tests, bone density tests and bowel cancer screenings," says Dr Newman.

Are you avoiding your health checks?

Research tells us that women in Australia often avoid getting regular health checks because they are uncomfortable, embarrassed or feel like they are too busy.

"Some women find the actual tests a little uncomfortable or awkward and some women find it confronting to actually think about and talk about their health," says Dr Newman. "For these women, it can be helpful to remember that health checks are there to prevent ill-health and give you peace of mind.

"Plus, knowledge is power and when you know what you're dealing with, you're more empowered to do something positive about it."

Finding the doctor that's right for you

One of the most important steps in getting your health checks in order is finding a GP with whom you are comfortable, and who understands your needs.

If you don't feel comfortable with your current GP, ask a friend or family member for a recommendation for a new one

"The important thing is to have a health professional on your side – someone who you can call on for your regular health checks, who can put you in the best position for good health," says Dr Newman.

So, why not start off this year with a simple resolution – just pick up the phone to make an appointment with your GP to get your regular health checks.

Read more about [health checks](#) on the Jean Hailes website, including the recommended tests for different ages and life stages.

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