

Health Check-Ups: When you need them—and when you don't



Like many people, you may schedule a yearly checkup or “annual physical” with your health care provider. It usually includes a health history, physical exam and tests.

It is important to have a regular family health care provider who helps make sure you receive the medical care that is best for your individual needs. But healthy people often don't necessarily need annual physicals, and those check-ups can do more harm than good. Here's why:

Annual physicals usually don't make you healthier.

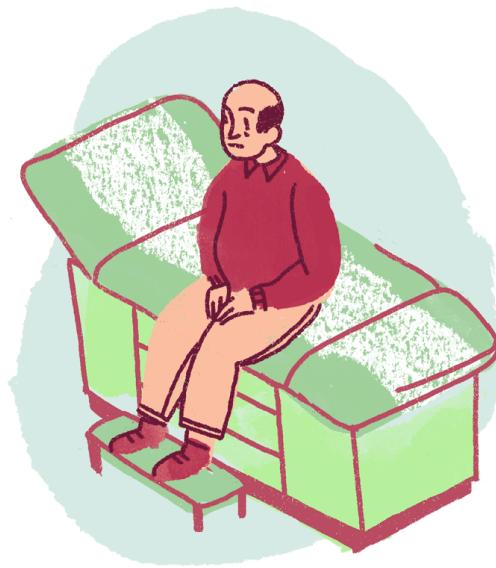
There have been many studies of the effects of annual checkups. In general, they probably won't help you stay well and live longer.

Tests and screenings can cause problems.

Most people should only have a test or exam if they have symptoms or risks factors.

One problem is getting a false-positive result. These false alarms can cause anxiety, and unnecessary follow-up tests and treatments. For example, a false-positive blood test can result in a biopsy.

An electrocardiogram (ECG) that is not interpreted correctly may lead to another test that exposes you to radiation. Or you might get a procedure to show arteries in the heart that has a risk of heart attack or death in two patients for every 100 who get the test.



Set a schedule with your family health care provider.

Your health care provider best knows your health history. You can discuss with him/her the best time for any exams or tests which you may need.

If your health care provider wants to schedule an annual physical, you can ask if it is necessary. Or ask if you can wait until you have a problem or are due for a test (such as a Pap smear or blood pressure test).

So when do adults need a checkup?

You may need a checkup:

- When you are sick.
- When you have a symptom that could mean illness.
- To manage chronic or ongoing conditions.
- To check on the effects of a new medicine.

- To help with risk factors like smoking or obesity.
- For prenatal care, if you are pregnant.
- For lifestyle issues like family planning.
- For other reasons that are based on your individual needs.

People in their twenties often do not see a health care provider for several years without risking their health, while older people who have developed risks for certain diseases may see a health care provider more often. It is best to have a trusted health care provider you see regularly who has access to your health records.

What about preventive care?

Preventive care is important. Having a regular health care provider helps you get preventive care.

Everyone should get the recommended immunizations and screening tests at the times and frequencies as recommended by the Canadian Task Force on the Periodic Health Examination.

What tests can help?

The recommendations below are for healthy adults. If you have risk factors or a chronic disease, you may need different tests or you may need a test more often. Ask your health care provider what schedule is right for you, but here are conditions many people should be screened for:

- High blood pressure
- Cervical cancer
- High cholesterol on men over 40 or women over 50 who have a low risk profile
- Diabetes
- Breast cancer
- Colon cancer
- Osteoporosis (weakened bones)
- Abdominal aortic aneurysm (enlarged blood vessel)

About Choosing Wisely Canada

Choosing Wisely Canada is the national voice for reducing unnecessary tests and treatments in health care. One of its important functions is to help clinicians and patients engage in conversations that lead to smart and effective care choices.

How this pamphlet was created:

This pamphlet was adapted with permission from a similar pamphlet used in the US Choosing Wisely campaign, organized by the ABIM Foundation. Modifications were made to ensure relevance for a Canadian audience. Canadian reviewers of this pamphlet included the College of Family Physicians of Canada.

This pamphlet is for you to use when talking with your health care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this pamphlet is at your own risk.