

## What you can do to stay healthy

Knowing how to talk to your healthcare provider will help you get the information you need to make good healthcare decisions. Sometimes it is difficult to ask questions or discuss sensitive topics.

Here are some tips to get more out of your office visit:

- **Make a list** of concerns and questions.
- **Describe your symptoms** clearly and briefly; tell your healthcare provider when they began and what makes them better or worse.
- **Let your healthcare provider know all prescription** and/or over-the-counter medications you are taking. Bring all bottles to your visit.
- **Bring a family member** or friend to take notes or provide support and make sure you understand everything you and your provider talk about.
- **If you do not understand** why you are having a particular test, ask your healthcare provider to explain.

## Here are six basic guidelines for a healthy future

- Don't smoke
- Eat a healthy diet
- Be physically active
- Drink alcohol in moderation
- Get early prenatal care
- Seek help and treatment for domestic violence, depression and substance abuse

## Essential Screening Tests:

**Blood Pressure Check:** This is done using a blood pressure cuff and stethoscope or automated monitor. Normal pressure is 120/70. High blood pressure or hypertension is usually the result of increased blood volume or narrowing of blood vessels. Increased pressure in blood vessels causes the heart to work harder to transport blood throughout the body.

### Cholesterol Testing/Lipid Disorders:

This screening is done by a blood test. Levels for LDL (bad cholesterol) and HDL (good cholesterol) as well as triglycerides are measured. High cholesterol and triglyceride levels can lead to complications such as stroke and heart attack.

**Colon Cancer Screening:** A colonoscopy is done using a tube, called a colonoscope, with which the doctor is able to look inside the entire large intestine. The procedure is used to look for early signs of cancer in the colon and rectum. If anything abnormal is seen in your colon, like a polyp, the physician can remove all or part of it using instruments passed through the scope. Pain medication and a mild sedative are usually given.

### Diabetes Screening (Blood Sugar Levels):

A blood test is done to check how your body is using sugar. A simple blood glucose test can be done to check the current level of sugar in your blood. A test of your hemoglobin A1C checks to see how your body has been metabolizing sugar over a 2-3 month period. High blood sugar levels may indicate the development of diabetes, which could lead to complications related to vision damage, loss of sensation and cardiovascular disease.

**Mammogram:** Low dose x-ray is used to examine the breast for cysts and tumors. During the exam, in which front and side images are taken, the breast is compressed by the mammography machine, in order to hold the breast still and even out the tissue.

### Pap Testing/Cervical Cancer Screening:

Cells taken from the cervix are examined using a microscope. Most commonly these cells are collected as part of a pelvic exam, using a speculum placed in the vagina. Pap tests are used to detect cervical changes that could lead to cervical cancer and viral diseases such as human papilloma virus (HPV).

You may find additional information about these and other topics at these websites.

**Centers for Disease Control:**  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) 800-311-3435

**US Preventive Services Task Force:**  
[www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov) 301-427-1364

**Dept of Health and Human Services:**  
[www.4women.gov](http://www.4women.gov) 800-994-9662  
TDD 888-220-5446

Not all organizations agree on what screening tests should be done and when. Our panel of physicians and researchers have reviewed the guidelines and selected those they think represent the best approach given the current scientific knowledge. Our expert panel members were from the University of North Carolina, Duke Medical Center and the Veteran's Administration Hospital (Durham).



CENTER FOR  
**WOMEN'S HEALTH**  
RESEARCH at UNC-CH

Office Address: 725 MLK Jr. Blvd.  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Mailing Address: UNC-CH  
Campus Box 7521  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7521

Phone: 919.966.7928  
Fax: 919.843.3120

Website: [www.cwhr.unc.edu](http://www.cwhr.unc.edu)

## Tests that could save your life.

Asking Questions. Getting Answers.  
What women need to know...now. Health tips. Essential tests. How to talk to your healthcare provider about health questions.



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hese are guidelines for preventive care and this table includes some of the most current recommendations for monitoring and maintaining your health. These tests may not prevent you from getting a disease and no test is 100% accurate. Even so, these basic screening procedures are the best methods for early detection and treatment of life-threatening health conditions. You should discuss the need for these procedures with your healthcare provider.

## Women's Health Screening Chart

Screenings:	Age:	18-39	40-49	50-64	65+	My Last Exam	My Next Exam
<b>Blood Pressure:</b> High blood pressure (BP) or hypertension increases the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD). Treatment can lower the risk.		Every 2 years with normal BP; every year with borderline levels	Every 2 years with normal BP; every year with borderline levels	Every 2 years with normal BP; every year with borderline levels	Every 2 years with normal BP; every year with borderline levels		
<b>Bone Mineral Density:</b> Low bone density increases fracture risk. Women should talk with their healthcare provider about risk factors and testing before age 65. Those 65 and older should have testing.		See "a" below	See "a" below	Talk with healthcare provider	All women should have a test		
<b>Cholesterol Testing/Lipid Disorders:</b> Lipid disorders increase risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death among women in the United States. Treatment can lower the risk.		Screening if risk factors for heart disease <sup>b</sup> are present	Starting at age 45, screen every 5 years	Screen every 5 years	Screen every 5 years		
<b>Colon Cancer Screening:</b> Colonoscopy, flexible sigmoidoscopy and home fecal occult blood test (FOBT) can all be used for screening. Women with a family history of colon cancer should talk with their healthcare provider about early screening.		See "a" below	Talk with healthcare provider	Colonoscopy every 10 years	Colonoscopy every 10 years		
<b>Diabetes Screening (Blood Sugar Levels):</b> High blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, and/or lack of regular physical exercise increase risk of diabetes. Women with risk factors should talk with their healthcare provider about testing.		Talk with healthcare provider	Talk with healthcare provider	Talk with healthcare provider	Talk with healthcare provider		
<b>Immunizations:</b> Flu vaccine Tetanus Pneumonia (PPV) (once in lifetime) Hepatitis B		At risk <sup>c</sup> Every 10 years At risk <sup>c</sup> At risk <sup>d</sup>	At risk <sup>c</sup> Every 10 years At risk <sup>c</sup> At risk <sup>d</sup>	Annually Every 10 years At risk <sup>c</sup> At risk <sup>d</sup>	Annually Every 10 years All women At risk <sup>d</sup>		
<b>Mammography:</b> Risk of breast cancer increases with age after 40 and is greater at age 50 and older. Women with a family or personal history of breast cancer should discuss this with their healthcare provider.		See "a" below	Every 1-2 yrs	Every 1-2 yrs	Every 1-2 yrs		
<b>Pap Testing/Cervical Cancer:</b> Pap testing should begin after a woman starts having intercourse. Most women who have had a hysterectomy no longer need Pap testing. Women should talk with their healthcare provider about their situation.		Every 1-3 yrs	Every 1-3 yrs	Every 1-3 yrs	Talk with healthcare provider		
<b>Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI):</b> Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the most common STIs. Women at risk <sup>e</sup> should talk with their healthcare provider about testing. Pregnant women should be screened at their first pre-natal visit.		At risk <sup>e</sup>	At risk <sup>e</sup>	At risk <sup>e</sup>	At risk <sup>e</sup>		

a For some age groups, not enough information is available for a specific recommendation

b Family history, smoking, high LDL ("bad" cholesterol) and low HDL ("good" cholesterol), obesity, uncontrolled high blood pressure, inactivity

c Lung, heart, or kidney disease; diabetes; HIV; or cancer

d Having more than 1 sex partner, having sex with someone who has Hepatitis B, having had a sexually transmitted infection in the past 6 months, working in a job that involves contact with human blood or blood products, injecting street drugs now or in the past, or traveling to places where Hepatitis B is common

e Having new or multiple sexual partners, previous STI, less than 25 years old, inconsistent condom use, sex work, and injection drug use