

CottageHouseCall

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Health Screenings for Baby Boomers

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Most people between the ages of 50 and 70 are either still vigorously working, preparing for retirement or somewhere in between. No matter which category you fit into, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important. Health screenings and diagnostic tests are one tool to help you and your physician stay on top of your overall health.

Most people in their 50s and 60s should receive regular screenings for cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure. A cholesterol, or lipid test, measures the fats in a person's blood; a surplus of lipids can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke. A fasting blood sugar test – taken only after an eight-hour period of fasting – will reveal if a person has diabetes. And a blood pressure check will help indicate an elevated risk for a variety of health issues including heart attack, stroke, heart and kidney damage. These three tests are generally performed as part of a routine physical exam. Personal and family health history and other factors will influence the frequency of testing recommended by your physician.

The American Dental Association recommends an annual exam by a dentist to examine the teeth for decay, gums for disease, and tongue, lips and soft tissues of the mouth for cancer. To maintain proper eye health, visiting an ophthalmologist or optometrist once every two to four years is recommended. During this exam, the doctor checks eye movement, peripheral vision, eye pressure, color vision and sharpness of your eyesight. This test will determine if a person has vision difficulties, needs corrective lenses or is a candidate for vision correction surgery.

Most people in their 50s and 60s continue to experience a slowing of the metabolism that began around age 35. As a result, many people experience weight gain during these years. Your physician will likely check your weight and body mass index (BMI) to determine your risk factors for illness such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and other diseases.

Most colorectal cancers are diagnosed in people over the age of 50. Colorectal cancer screenings are used to detect cancer, precancerous polyps and/or other abnormal conditions. The most common type of test is the colonoscopy, in which a gastroenterologist examines the length of the colon by using a long, thin flexible tube with a tiny video camera on the tip.

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Some exams are gender-specific. For women, a mammogram and clinical breast exam should be performed at least every year or two, and the American Cancer Society suggests that women perform monthly breast self-examinations. A PAP test detects possible cancer and precancerous changes of the cervix; PAP tests are recommended annually for sexually active women. Your family physician will recommend the testing frequency right for you.

Men generally begin having prostate exams at age 50. This exam can be performed quickly and easily in a physician's office using two tests: the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test and the Digital Rectal Exam (DRE).

The years in your 50s and 60s can be full of changes and events that can impact your health. An annual check up can help give an early indication of medical problems that may be developing. Contact your physician to determine a schedule of health screenings that meets your individual needs.

Test: Vision

Source: American Association of Ophthalmology
Frequency: Every two to four years

Test: Dental (teeth, gums, tongue)

Source: American Dental Association
Frequency: Annual

Test: Hearing

Source: Centers for Disease Control
Frequency: Every three years

Test: Cholesterol

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Lipid test every five years

Test: Blood Pressure

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Every two years

Test: Colorectal Cancer

Source: American Cancer Society
Frequency: Annual stool test; colonoscopy every ten years

Test: Type 2 Diabetes

Source: American Diabetes Association
Frequency: Every three years; possibly more often depending on certain risk factors

Test: Vaccinations

Source: Centers for Disease Control
Frequency: Pneumonia shot around age 65; annual flu shot; tetanus booster every ten years

Test: Thyroid

Source: WebMD
Frequency: Thyroid hormone test every three years

Test: Cervical Cancer (women only)

Source: American Cancer Society
Frequency: Annual PAP test

Test: Breast Cancer (women only)

Source: American Cancer Society
Frequency: Regular self exams; Annual clinical breast exam and mammogram

Test: Prostate (men only)

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Annual