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6 Health Screenings to Help Women Prevent Disease

Don't let heart disease, stroke, and other serious health conditions sneak up on you. Instead, prevent them by seeing your doctor for a yearly well-woman checkup.

At your checkup, your doctor will likely suggest health screenings. These tests can help spot potentially deadly conditions before they become life-threatening. Here are six screenings that can help you stay healthy.

1. Blood pressure

Nearly half of all Americans older than age 20 have chronic high blood pressure—130/80 mmHg or greater. Getting your blood pressure checked, and changing your lifestyle or using medication, if necessary, can reduce your risk for stroke and heart disease.

2. Cholesterol

This simple blood test—after an overnight fast—measures levels of HDL, or “good,” cholesterol and LDL, or “bad,” cholesterol, as well as triglycerides. These fats in your blood can affect your risk for heart disease and stroke.

3. Pap test

This test, as part of a pelvic exam, takes a sample of cells from the cervix to check for cervical cancer. Women ages 21 to 29 should get a Pap test every three years. From ages 30 to 65, you should get screened every three to five years. Cervical cancer and the beginning stages of the disease are treatable if caught early.

4. Mammogram

This breast X-ray can find breast cancer in its early, most treatable stages. Talk with your doctor if you're between ages 40 and 49 about when to start getting a mammogram. If you're between ages 50 and 74, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends a screening every two years.

5. Blood glucose

This simple blood test helps detect type 2 diabetes and prediabetes, which can increase the risk for heart disease and other complications. It's recommended for adults ages 40 to 70 who are overweight.

6. Colonoscopy

During this test, the doctor will examine your colon, looking for signs of cancer and small growths that can become cancerous over time, which can be removed during the test. Experts recommend getting a colonoscopy starting at age 50.