

PREVENTIVE HEALTH CARE — WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

A Resource for Veterans, Service Members, and Their Families

The long term goal of preventative health care is to prevent health problems and/or identify and treat them early to reduce ill health effects. The following information about screening tests and some other preventive measures will be helpful to you in managing your future health.

Heart Health

BLOOD PRESSURE

All adults should get their blood pressure checked at least every 2 years. High blood pressure is most common in African Americans and people over 45. People with high blood pressure often have no symptoms. Untreated high blood pressure often causes damage to the heart, blood vessels, eyes and kidneys. Treatment of high blood pressure greatly reduces the risk of these problems. (For more information, visit www.MayoClinic.com and search for high blood pressure.)

CHOLESTEROL

All people should get their cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 35 for men, and at age 45 for women. If you are younger, talk to your doctor about whether to have your cholesterol checked if you have diabetes, high blood pressure, if heart disease runs in your family, or if you smoke.

Talk to your doctor about whether you should be checked for diabetes, or should be taking aspirin to prevent heart attack.

Cancer

SKIN CANCER

Anyone can get skin cancer. It can occur in areas that are exposed to sun, and to areas that are not. See your doctor if you notice a new skin growth, a change in a mole, a sore that doesn't heal in 2 weeks, or other unusual skin changes.

ORAL CANCER

Oral cancer includes cancers of the lip, tongue, pharynx, and mouth. Most oral cancers occur in people older than

40 who use tobacco or alcohol. People who are in the sun a lot are also at risk for cancer of the lip. If you have any of these risk factors, ask your doctor or dentist to check you for oral cancer.

COLORECTAL CANCER

All adults should be tested for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. You should be tested at an earlier age if you have had polyps, or you have family members who have had colorectal cancer, breast cancer, or cancer of the ovaries or uterus. Talk to your doctor about the family history and at what age you should be tested. There are a number of different tests for colorectal cancer – talk to your doctor about which he/she recommends for you.

Cancer for Women

BREAST CANCER

All women by age 20 should start checking their breasts for lumps every month. Ask your doctor or gynecologist how to do this. By age 30, all women should have their breasts checked by their doctor every 1-2 years. All women by age 40 should have a mammogram every 1-2 years. If you have risk factors for breast cancer, such as a family history, talk to your doctor about whether to start mammograms sooner.

CERVICAL CANCER

All women who are or have been sexually active are at risk for cancer of the cervix unless their uterus has been completely removed. A Pap test is used to detect cervical cancer. Women should have a Pap test every 3 years, and women at increased risk of cervical cancer may need the test more often. You are at increased risk of cervical cancer if you have had a sexually transmitted disease, have had more than one sex partner, or have had previous abnormal Pap tests.

Cancer for Men

TESTICULAR CANCER

Testicular cancer is most common in men ages 20 to 35, but can occur at any age. Some health professionals think that a monthly testicular self examination (TSE) can improve your chances of finding a tumor early. Early diagnosis is important because testicular cancer is highly treatable when found early. Talk to your doctor about testicular self exam, and also go to MayoClinic.com and search for “testicular self exam”.

PROSTATE CANCER

Prostate cancer is most common in men over 50. Your risk of prostate cancer may be increased if you are black, or if your father or brother has had prostate cancer. Talk to your doctor about whether or not you should be screened for prostate cancer.

Sexual Health

SCREENING FOR SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE (STD)

Talk to your doctor about screening for HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, hepatitis, syphilis and other STD's. You are at higher risk for STD's if you have had unprotected sex with a new partner or multiple partners since your last screening. You are also at a higher risk if you are a man who has had sex with men, are a person being treated for STD, or if have used illicit intravenous drugs. People with tattoos should be screened for Hepatitis C. People who had a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985 may be at risk for HIV. All pregnant women should be evaluated at the first pre-natal visit (during the first 1-3 months of pregnancy) for certain STD's, including a history of genital herpes, since some STD's require monitoring or treatment to protect the health of the baby. Screening tests for Gonorrhea and Chlamydia can now be done either through a urine sample or a swab test.

Bone Health

OSTEOPOROSIS

After menopause, women are more at risk of osteoporosis,

or thinning bones, which makes your bones break more easily. A bone density test can determine if your bones are prone to breaking and may need medicine to reduce your risk of fractures. All women should have regular bone density tests starting at age 65, and women who weigh less than 155 lbs. should start testing at age 60.

Other

VISION

All people should have a full eye exam by an eye doctor by age 39, especially those who have risk factors for eye disease. Risk factors include: a personal or family history of eye disease, chronic disease (such as diabetes or high blood pressure), African-American race, nearsightedness, and others. After age 65, all people should have their eyes examined on a regular basis. It is important to detect eye diseases through screening, before symptoms appear, since damage to vision from some conditions, such as glaucoma, can be prevented through early identification.

For Women

FOLIC ACID

If you are a woman who can become pregnant, you should take at least 400 micrograms (or 0.4 mg) of folic acid every day. Folic acid, also known as folate, is a B-vitamin that can be found in some enriched foods and in vitamin pills. If you have enough folic acid in your body when you become pregnant, this vitamin can lower the risk for birth defects of your baby's brain or spine.

Immunizations

FLU VACCINE

In some people, there is greater risk of serious complications, such as pneumonia, due to getting the flu. To prevent this, yearly flu vaccines are recommended for: people 50 and older, health care workers, people who have frequent contact with children less than 6 years old who are not vaccinated, women who are/will be pregnant during flu season, and people with chronic illnesses.

Resources

Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ): “Pocket Guide to Good Health for Adults”

www.ahrq.gov

American Academy of Family Physicians

www.familydoctor.org

American Optometric Association Clinical Guidelines

www.aoa.org

Mayo Clinic

www.MayoClinic.com

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

www.acog.org

Centers for Disease Control Preventive Health Clinical Guidelines

www.cdc.gov