Preventative Care for Adults - Female

Studies show that half of deaths in the United States today result from unhealthy lifestyle practices. This includes ignoring preventive care suggestions. Preventive health guidelines for women include the following key practices:

- A routine yearly physical is a good way to check with your primary caregiver about your health and preventive screening. It is a chance to share any concerns and updates on your health, and to receive a thorough all-over exam.
- If you smoke cigarettes, find out from your caregiver how to quit. It can literally save your life, no matter how long you have been a tobacco user. If you do not use tobacco, never start.
- Maintain a healthy diet and normal weight. Increased weight leads to problems with blood pressure and diabetes. Decrease saturated fat in your diet and increase regular exercise. Eat a variety of foods, including fruit, vegetables, animal or vegetable protein (meat, fish, chicken, and eggs, or beans, lentils, and tofu), and grains, such as rice. Get information about proper diet from your caregiver, if needed.
- Aerobic exercise helps maintain good heart health. The CDC and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (a brisk walk that increases your heart rate and breathing) on most days of the week. Ongoing high blood pressure should be treated with medicines, if weight loss and exercise are not effective.
- Avoid smoking, drinking too much alcohol (more than two drinks per day), and use of street drugs. Do not share needles with anyone. Ask for professional help if you need support or instructions about stopping the use of alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs.
  - Maintain normal blood lipids and cholesterol, by minimizing your intake of saturated fat. Eat a well rounded diet, with plenty of fruit and vegetables. The National Institutes of Health encourage women to eat 5-9 servings of fruit and vegetables each day. Your caregiver can give instructions to help you keep your risk of heart disease or stroke low. High blood pressure causes heart disease and increases risk of stroke. Blood pressure should be checked every 1-2 years, from age 20 onward.
  - Blood tests for high cholesterol, which causes heart and vessel disease, should begin at age 20 and be repeated every 5 years, if test results are normal. (Repeat tests more often if results are high.)
  - Diabetes screening involves taking a blood sample to check your blood sugar level, after a fasting period. This is done once every 3 years, after age 45, if test results are normal.
  - Breast cancer screening is essential to preventive care for women. All women age 20 and older should perform a breast self-exam every month. At age 40 and older, women should have their caregiver complete a breast exam each year. Women at ages 40-50 should have a mammogram (*x-ray film*) of the breasts each year. Your caregiver can discuss when to start your yearly mammograms.
  - Cervical cancer screening includes taking a Pap smear (*sample of cells examined under a microscope*) from the cervix (*end of the uterus*). It also includes testing for HPV (*Human Papilloma Virus, which can cause cervical cancer*). Screening and a pelvic exam should begin at age 21, or 3 years after a woman becomes sexually active. Screening should occur every year, with a Pap smear but no HPV testing, up to age 30. After age 30, you should have a Pap smear every 3 years with HPV testing, if no HPV was found previously.
- Colon cancer can be detected, and often prevented, long before it is life threatening. Most routine colon cancer screening begins at the age of 50. On a yearly basis, your caregiver may provide easy-to-use take-home tests to check for hidden blood in the stool. Use of a small camera at the end of a tube, to directly examine the colon (*sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy*), can detect the earliest forms of colon cancer and can be life saving. Talk to your caregiver about this at age 50, when routine screening begins. (Screening is repeated every 5 years, unless early forms of pre-cancerous polyps or small growths are found.)
- Practice safe sex. Use condoms. Condoms are used for birth control and to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Unsafe sex is sexual activity without the use of safeguards, such as condoms and avoidance of high-risk acts, to reduce the chances of getting or spreading STIs. STIs include gonorrhea (*the clap*), chlamydia, syphilis, trichimonas, herpes, HPV (*human papilloma virus*) and HIV (human

immunodeficiency virus), which causes AIDS. Herpes, HIV, and HPV are viral illnesses that have no cure. They can result in disability, cancer, and death.

- HPV causes cancer of the cervix, and other infections that can be transmitted from person to person. There is a vaccine for HPV, and females should get immunized between the ages of 11 and 26. It requires a series of 3 shots.
- Osteoporosis is a disease in which the bones lose minerals and strength as we age. This can result in serious bone fractures. Risk of osteoporosis can be identified using a bone density scan. Women ages 65 and over should discuss this with their caregivers, as should women after menopause who have other risk factors. Ask your caregiver whether you should be taking a calcium supplement and Vitamin D, to reduce the rate of osteoporosis.
- Menopause can be associated with physical symptoms and risks. Hormone replacement therapy is available to decrease these. You should talk to your caregiver about whether starting or continuing to take hormones is right for you.
- Use sunscreen with SPF (skin protection factor) of 15 or more. Apply sunscreen liberally and repeatedly throughout the day. Being outside in the sun, when your shadow is shorter than you are, means you are being exposed to sun at greater intensity. Lighter skinned people are at a greater risk of skin cancer. Wear sunglasses, to protect your eyes from too much damaging sunlight (which can speed up cataract formation).
- Once a month, do a whole body skin exam or review, using a mirror to look at your back. Notify your caregiver of changes in moles, especially if there are changes in shapes, colors, irregular border, a size larger than a pencil eraser, or new moles develop.
- Keep carbon monoxide and smoke detectors in your home, and functioning, at all times. Change the batteries every 6 months, or use a model that plugs into the wall.
- Stay up to date with your tetanus shots and other required immunizations. A booster for tetanus should be given every 10 years. Be sure to get your flu shot every year, since 5%-20% of the U.S. population comes down with the flu. The composition of the flu vaccine changes each year, so being vaccinated once is not enough. Get your shot in the fall, before the flu season peaks. The table below lists important vaccines to get. Other vaccines to consider include for Hepatitis A virus (to *prevent a form of infection of the liver, by a virus acquired from food*), Varicella Zoster (*a virus that causes shingles*), and Meningococcal (*against bacteria which cause a form of meningitis*).
- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, and floss once a day. Good oral hygiene prevents tooth decay and gum disease, which can be painful and can cause other health problems. Visit your dentist for a routine oral and dental check up and preventive care every 6-12 months.
- The Body Mass Index or BMI is a way of measuring how much of your body is fat. Having a BMI above 27 increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke and other problems related to obesity. Your caregiver can help determine your BMI, and can develop an exercise and dietary program to help you achieve or maintain this measurement at a healthy level.
- Wear seat belts whenever you are in a vehicle, whether as passenger or driver, and even for short drives of a few minutes.
- If you bicycle, wear a helmet at all times.

Preventative Care for Adult Women			
Preventative Services	**Ages 19-39**	**Ages 40-64**	**Ages 65 and over**
Health risk assessment and lifestyle counseling.			
Blood pressure check.**	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years	Every 1-2 years
Total cholesterol check including HDL.**	Every 5 years beginning at age 35	Every 5 years beginning at age 20, or more often if risk is high	Every 5 years through age 75, then optional
Breast self exam.	Monthly in all women ages 20 and older	Monthly	Monthly

Clinical breast exam.**	Every 3 years beginning at age 20	Every year	Every year
Mammogram.**		Every year beginning at age 50, optional from age 40-49 (discuss with your caregiver).	Every year until age 75, then optional
Pap Smear** and HPV Screening.	Every year from ages 21 through 29	Every 3 years from ages 30 through 65, if HPV is negative	Optional; talk with your caregiver
Flexible sigmoidoscopy** or colonoscopy.**		Every 5 years beginning at age 50	Every 5 years until age 80; then optional
FOBT (fecal occult blood test) of stool.		Every year beginning at age 50	Every year until 80; then optional
Skin self-exam.	Monthly	Monthly	Monthly
Tetanus-diphtheria (Td) immunization.	Every 10 years	Every 10 years	Every 10 years
Influenza immunization.**	Every year	Every year	Every year
HPV immunization.	Once between the ages of 11 and 26		
Pneumococcal immunization.**	Optional	Optional	Every 5 years
Hepatitis B immunization.**	Series of 3 immunizations (if not done previously, usually given at 0, 1 to 2, and 4 to 6 months)	Check with your caregiver, if vaccination not previously given	Check with your caregiver, if vaccination not previously given
*** Family history and personal history of risk and conditions may change your caregiver's recommendations.*			

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