

HEALTH SCREENINGS YOU'LL NEED

Did the pandemic make you neglect routine medical tests? Here's a checklist — by age group — of what to catch up on.

Vaccination against COVID-19 is becoming more widespread, and prevention of the disease (including the now-dominant Delta variant) is better understood than ever. But preventing other diseases, or catching them early when they're most treatable, has fallen behind during the pandemic. "Many people skipped their physicals or wellness exams in 2020, and others put off their vaccinations for pneumonia and/or shingles until they finished their COVID vaccine series," says Seena Shekari, D.O., medical director of Valley Medical Group's Primary & Walk-In Care Center in Waldwick. "Mammograms, colonoscopies and bone density scans were also brushed aside last year."

Don't brush aside your own long-term health! We've assembled this guide to important preventive screenings that can safeguard your health through life's stages. Remember: The dangerous conditions you need to guard against don't go on sabbatical when a new virus arrives.

AGES 1 MONTH TO 18

Health screenings vary for infants, toddlers, children and teens, and your pediatrician can tell you what is recommended for each age group. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends developmental and behavioral screening for all children during well-child visits at 9 months, 18 months and 30 months, with screening for autism-spectrum disorder at 18 months and 24 months. Of course, inoculations begin as early as 2 months of age. Dr. Shekari adds that vaccines are very important for kids of all ages. (For childhood vaccination schedules recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, go online to visit [cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/easy-to-read/child-easyread.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/easy-to-read/child-easyread.html) and [cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/child-adolescent.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/child-adolescent.html).)

Finally, says the doctor, "key markers are physical, cognitive and social developmental milestones."

AGES 18 TO 39

Yearly:

- Blood-pressure screening for heart conditions
- Depression/mental health screening
- Infectious disease screening
- Flu vaccine
- Skin check for skin cancer
- Breast exam for suspicious lumps (women)
- Testicular exam for testicular cancer (men)

Every three years:

- Cervical cancer screening starting at age 21 (women)

Every five years:

- Cholesterol (lipid) blood tests (yearly if you have risk factors for cardiovascular disease)
- HPV (human papillomavirus) test

For specific patient groups:

- Thyroid-stimulating hormone test (TSH) for underactive or overactive thyroid—if you're symptomatic
- Diabetes and cholesterol—if you're overweight or have a family history
- Colon cancer or breast cancer—if you have a family history

AGES 40 TO 64

Continue the screenings in the 18-to-39 age group as recommended by your physician and begin these:

Yearly:

- Mammogram for signs of breast cancer—at an earlier age if high risk (women)
- Lung cancer screening with low-dose CT (computed tomography) scans if over age 55 with a history of smoking 1 pack per day for 20

years, 2 packs per day for 10 years, etc.

Every few years:

- Ovarian cancer screening—every three years if you're at high risk (women)
- Prostate-specific (PSA) blood test and/or a digital rectal exam—at age 55 and every two to four years Earlier if you're high-risk (men)
- Blood glucose test for type 2 diabetes—earlier if you're high-risk
- Colorectal cancer screening at age 45—with stool test every year or with colonoscopy every five years

Once:

- Shingles vaccine, which consists of two inoculations of the Shingrix vaccine at an interval of two to six months

AGE 65 AND OLDER

Continue the screenings in the earlier adult age groups as recommended by your physician and begin these:

Yearly:

- Screening for Alzheimer's disease or dementia

Every few years:

- Bone density study (DEXA scan)—every two to five years if you have a risk factor such as chronic steroid use (men). Earlier than 65 if high-risk (women)

Once:

- Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening for men 65 to 75 with a smoking history, even if they've only smoked one cigarette
- Pneumococcal vaccine

OTHER SCREENINGS FOR GOOD HEALTH

Additional exams for adults include regular dental and eye exams, and hearing tests if you have symptoms of hearing loss. Your primary care provider may also perform a mental health exam to evaluate psychological concerns. A physical assessment of your height, weight and body mass index (BMI) can help determine future health risks and guide lifestyle changes in diet and exercise. And Dr. Shekari suggests that everyone in every age group get their flu vaccine this fall, even though last year saw historically low levels of flu due to masking and social distancing.

"The most important thing a patient can do is see his or her primary care doctor yearly," says Dr. Shekari. "That way we can assess individual risk factors and benefits of various tests and decide the best course of action."