

Prevention is the Best Medicine

By Beatrice Hoolboom, M.D.
Internal Medicine

We've all heard the sayings, an apple a day keeps the doctor away and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In fact, many insurance companies encourage annual physical exams to help promote healthy lifestyles and disease prevention. Today's supporters of preventive medicine recommend an annual exam and periodic screening tests. The following describes these screening tests, who should have them, when they should begin these tests and how often they need to be repeated.



Beatrice Hoolboom, M.D.

Adult Screening Tests

Female Breast Cancer. Women should perform monthly breast self-exams beginning at age 20. If you are uncertain of how to do this exam, or are not sure if you are doing it properly, ask your physician to discuss this exam with you. In addition, your physician should perform an annual examination, usually as part of your annual physical. Mammography, a special x-ray of the breasts, should be done annually beginning at age 50, unless problems have been detected earlier.

Cervical Cancer. The best screening test for cervical cancer is the PAP smear in which cells from the cervix are collected and looked at under a high-powered microscope to detect any abnormalities. All sexually active women, and all women age 20 or older, should have this test every one to three years until age 65. If an abnormality has been detected, your physician may recommend more frequent screening.

Colon Cancer. Fecal occult blood testing should be performed annually beginning at age 50. In addition, a sigmoidoscopy should be performed every three to five years beginning at age 50. This procedure involves inserting a thin, flexible tube

into the rectum to view the lower portion of the colon and check for abnormalities.

Prostate Cancer. Although there is controversy regarding PSA (prostate-specific antigen) testing and a digital rectal exam and their ability to accurately detect early prostate cancer, the American Cancer Society recommends these tests annually for all

men age 50 and older. Some studies show that PSA testing may show elevated levels of PSA due to causes other than cancer, resulting in false-positive results for the patient.

Skin Cancer. There are no set recommendations for skin cancer; however, patients should be aware of their bodies and any changes in the skin, especially moles, and report these to their physician.

Cholesterol. All adults over age 20 should have a cholesterol screening test done at least once every five years. Total cholesterol should be below 200 and HDL "good" cholesterol should be 40 or higher.

Immunizations. Many of us are familiar with the importance of immunizations against childhood diseases such as measles, mumps and chickenpox, but don't realize that there are several immunizations that are important for adults as well. Following is a list of the more commonly recommended adult vaccinations, including who should receive them.

Hepatitis B. Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by viruses, toxic substances or immunological abnormalities. Hepatitis B is a viral illness transmitted by infected body fluids and sexual contact. This immunization is recommended for health care workers in contact with body
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High Blood Pressure: The Silent Bomb continued...

fluids and others at high risk such as those who are sexually active, including teens.

Influenza. A common virus usually appearing in early winter, influenza can be prevented or its severity reduced with an annual immunization. Adults with high-risk conditions, such as students, health care workers and day care workers and healthy persons age 65 and older should receive this vaccination every year.

Pneumococcal Polysaccharide. Just like the flu, pneumonia is a common wintertime illness, especially among young children and older adults. Therefore, persons at increased risk of pneumococcal disease including persons with certain chronic diseases and those age 65 and older should have this immunization. Boosters may be recommended for some people.

Tetanus-Diphtheria. When you were a child, this is the shot you would often receive after stepping on a rusty nail. As an adult, you should receive a booster immunization against tetanus-diphtheria every 10 years.

Varicella. Although commonly considered a childhood disease, chickenpox can also infect adolescents and adults who escaped this disease when they were younger. Susceptible teens and adults, especially health care workers and others likely to be exposed, such as day care workers and teachers, should be immunized against varicella. These are just a few tips to help keep you healthy and out of your doctor's office. Remember, it's also important to eat a well-balanced diet, get some exercise and a good night's rest.

For more information, call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at www.ah.com.

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