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YOUR GUIDE TO PREVENTIVE HEALTH

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AN APPLE A DAY

You are responsible, in large part, for managing your own preventive health care. It is the most important investment of your time and money. Yet, most people do not receive all the important preventive services they need: screening tests for early detection of disease, immunizations and education about healthy habits.

Many are not aware of these various preventive-care services, and even if they are, they may not be able to afford them.

A great number of Americans have no health insurance to pay for tests, vaccines and other medical care; many do not get continuity of care; do not go to their doctors for years: do not go for the tests their doctors recommend; or are confused about which tests to request. They may not know that prevention is the most economical form of medicine — well worth budgeting for, even if insurance doesn't cover it.

With tests for some cancers, there's the embarrassment factor. Some people may dread being tested for colon, prostate, cervical or breast cancer and they are relieved if the doctors fail to mention it. Some people would simply rather not know.

Preventive Services for Healthy Adults

These are the major screening tests (that is, routine tests for people without symptoms) to consider. The listing below follows this sequence: the service, who needs it, how often and other comments.

• **BLOOD PRESSURE MEASUREMENT** (to detect hypertension): All adults. Once every two years for those with normal blood pressure. More frequently for those over 60 and anyone with readings over 120/80.

• **CHOLESTEROL MEASUREMENT** (including HDL, LDL, and triglycerides): All adults. Once every five years. More often if any results are abnormal or there are other risk factors. Those at high risk for heart disease need medical advice about lifestyle changes and possibly drug therapy.

• **PAP TEST** (for early detection of cervical cancer): All women, starting within three years of becoming sexually active, no later than age 21. Annually until age 30. After 30, three consecutive years are normal, once every two to three years, unless a woman smokes, has multiple sex partners or other risk factors. Women 70 and over who have had normal results can stop being screened, unless they are at high risk. Women who have had their cervix removed do not need to be tested.

• **BREAST CANCER SCREENING** (mammography): All women 50 and over; those at higher risk need to start earlier. Annually. Those at high risks should also have an annual MRI scan starting at age 30. Clinical breast exams are important too — discuss with your doctor.

• **COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING** (fecal occult blood test, sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy): Everyone who is 50 and over, earlier for those at high risk. Occult blood test annually plus sigmoidoscopy every five years. Or preferably, colonoscopy every 10 years. X-ray with barium enema or CT ("virtual") colonoscopy may also be done. Those with abnormal results need more frequent testing.

• **PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING** (prostate specific antigen or PSA test; digital rectal exam or DRE:) Men with family history of prostate cancer start testing at age 40. For others, DRE and possibly PSA, starting at age 50. DRE to be done annually; PSA on professional advice. Routine PSA screening for all men remains controversial. Discuss with your doctor.

• **DIABETES SCREENING** (fasting blood glucose test): Everyone 45 and older; earlier for those at high risk. Every two to three years. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, obese people, and those with strong family history need more frequent screening, starting at age 30.

• **BONE DENSITY TESTING:** Women 65 and over; younger women at high risk for bone loss; men at high risk. Frequency depends on professional advice. Risk factors include being small-boned, sedentary, a heavy drinker or a smoker, or having a personal or family history of osteoporosis.

• **GLAUCOMA SCREENING:** People at high risk; those over 65, very nearsighted, or diabetic; those with family history of glaucoma. Frequency depends on professional advice of eye specialist. Benefits of routine screening remain unproven. Still, most eye specialists advise testing all adults 40 and over every three to five years.

• **DENTAL CHECKUP:** All adults. Every six months, or on professional advice. Should include cleaning and exam for oral cancer.

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Ask your doctor about the different screenings you can have to stay healthy and detect any symptoms early. If you don't feel like doing it for you, do it for the ones who love you the most!