



Women: Stay Healthy at 50+



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality**

www.ahrq.gov

Use this information to help you stay healthy at ages 50 and above. Learn which screening tests you need and when to get them, which medicines may prevent diseases, and daily steps you can take for good health.



Get the Screenings You Need

Screenings are tests that look for diseases before you have symptoms. Blood pressure checks and mammograms are examples of screenings.

You can get some screenings, such as blood pressure readings, in your doctor's office. Others, such as mammograms, need special equipment, so you may need to go to a different office.

After a screening test, it's important to ask when you will see the results and who you should talk to about them.

Breast Cancer. Talk with your health care team about whether you need a mammogram.

BRCA 1 and 2 Genes. If you have a family member with breast, ovarian, or peritoneal cancer, talk with your doctor or nurse about your family history. Women with a strong family history of certain cancers may benefit from genetic counselling and BRCA genetic testing

Cervical Cancer. Get a Pap smear every 3 years or get a combination Pap smear and human papilloma virus (HPV) test every 5 years until age 65. If you are older than 65 or have had a hysterectomy, talk with your doctor or nurse about whether you still need to be screened.

Colon Cancer. If you are 75 or younger, get a screening test for colorectal cancer. Several different tests – for example, a stool test or a colonoscopy – can detect this cancer. Your health care team can help you decide which is best for you.

If you are between the ages of 76 and 85, talk with your doctor or nurse about whether you should continue to be screened.

Depression. Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. Talk to your health care team about being screened for depression, especially if during the last 2 weeks:

- You have felt down, sad, or hopeless.
- You have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things.

Diabetes. Get screened for diabetes (high blood sugar) if you have high blood pressure or if you take medication for high blood pressure.

Diabetes can cause problems with your heart, brain, eyes, feet, kidneys, nerves, and other body parts.

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV). Get screened one time for HCV infection if:

- You were born between 1945 and 1965.
- You have ever injected drugs.
- You received a blood transfusion before 1992.

If you currently are an injection drug user, you should be screened regularly.

High Blood Cholesterol. Have your cholesterol checked regularly with a blood test if:

- You use tobacco.
- You are overweight or obese.
- You have a personal history of heart disease or blocked arteries.
- A male relative in your family had a heart attack before age 50 or a female relative, before age 60.

High Blood Pressure. Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years.

HIV. If you are 65 or younger, get screened for HIV. If you are older than 65, talk to your doctor or nurse about whether you should be screened.

Lung Cancer. Talk to your doctor or nurse about getting screened for lung cancer if you are between the ages of 55 and 80, have a 30 pack-year smoking history, and smoke now or have quit within the past 15 years. (Your pack-year history is the number of packs of cigarettes smoked per day times the number of years you have smoked.) Know that quitting smoking is the best thing you can do for your health.

Osteoporosis (Bone Thinning). Have a screening test at age 65 to make sure your bones are strong. The most common test is a DEXA scan – a low-dose x-ray of the spine and hip. If you are younger than 65 and at high risk for bone fractures, you should also be screened. Talk with your health care team about your risk for bone fractures.

Overweight and Obesity. The best way to learn if you are overweight or obese is to find your body mass index (BMI). You can find your BMI by entering your height and weight into a BMI calculator, such as the one available at: www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/.

A BMI between 18.5 and 25 indicates a normal weight. Persons with a BMI of 30 or higher may be obese. If you are obese, talk to your health care team about getting intensive counseling and help with changing your behaviors to lose weight. Overweight and obesity can lead to diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

*You know your body better than anyone else. Always tell your health care team about any changes in your health, including your **vision and hearing**. Ask them about being checked for any condition you are concerned about, not just the ones here. If you are wondering about diseases such as **Alzheimer's disease** or **skin cancer**, for example, ask about them.*

Get Preventive Medicines If You Need Them

Aspirin. If you are 55 or older, ask your health care team if you should take aspirin to prevent strokes. Your health care team can help you decide whether taking aspirin to prevent stroke is right for you.

Breast Cancer Drugs. Talk to your doctor about your risks for breast cancer and whether you should take medicines that may reduce those risks. Medications to reduce breast cancer have some potentially serious harms, so think through both the potential benefits and harms.

Vitamin D to Avoid Falls. If you are 65 or older and have a history of falls, mobility problems, or other risks for falling, ask your doctor about taking a vitamin D supplement to help reduce your chances of falling. Exercise and physical therapy may also help.

Immunizations.

- Get a flu shot every year.
- Get shots for tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. Get a tetanus booster if it has been more than 10 years since your last shot.
- If you are 60 or older, get a shot to prevent shingles.
- If you are 65 or older, get a pneumonia shot.
- Talk with your health care team about whether you need other vaccinations. You can also find which ones you need by going to: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/.



Take Steps to Good Health

Be physically active and make healthy

food choices. Learn how at

<http://www.healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/nutrition-and-physical-activity>.

Get to a healthy weight and stay there.

Balance the calories you take in from food

and drink with the calories you burn off by your activities.

Be tobacco free. For tips on how to quit, go to www.smokefree.gov.

To talk to someone about how to quit, call the National Quitline:

1-800-QUITNOW (784-8669).

If you drink alcohol, have no more than one drink per day. A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

Get More Information on Good Health

Check out these Federal Government Web sites:

Healthfinder.gov. Guides and tools for healthy living, an encyclopedia of health-related topics, health news, and more. Go to: www.healthfinder.gov.

MedlinePlus. Health information from government agencies and health organizations, including a medical encyclopedia and health tools. Go to: www.medlineplus.gov.

Questions Are the Answer. Information on how to get involved in your health care by asking questions, understanding your condition, and learning about your options. Go to: www.ahrq.gov/questionsaretheanswer.

If you don't have access to a computer, talk to your local librarian about health information in the library.

Sources

This information is based on research from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). The USPSTF is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force makes recommendations based on rigorous reviews of the scientific evidence to help primary care professionals and patients decide together whether a preventive service is right for a patient's needs. Task Force members are practicing doctors and nurses in the fields of family medicine, general internal medicine, gynecology/obstetrics, nursing, pediatrics, and preventive medicine, as well as health behavior specialists. AHRQ provides scientific, administrative, and dissemination support to the USPSTF. For more information about the USPSTF, go to: www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org



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