

Routine Checkups for Adults

A routine checkup refers to a visit to a primary care physician for the purpose of maintaining wellness.

Routine checkups are centered around preventing illness rather than treating an active symptom or already diagnosed illness. This type of visit is also referred to as a *wellness visit*, *preventive visit*, *health evaluation*, or *general medical examination*.

Although often referred to as “physicals” or “annuals,” these visits do not need to include a physical examination and do not need to happen yearly. However, because these visits are typically covered by insurance companies once a year for adults, many people see their doctors for checkups on a yearly basis.

What to Expect During a Routine Checkup

Checkups generally include

- Checking blood pressure, heart rate, weight, and height
- Discussing cancer screening tests that are appropriate for age and medical history (such as colonoscopy for colon cancer, mammogram for breast cancer, Papanicolaou test for cervical cancer)
- Discussing other screening tests (such as for sexually transmitted infections, osteoporosis, hepatitis C virus)
- Drawing blood for measurements that are appropriate for age and medical history (such as cholesterol and glucose levels)
- Administering immunizations (such as for influenza, tetanus, pneumonia, shingles)
- Screening for depression
- Additional assessments for older individuals, such as fall risk, hearing loss, memory loss, and discussion of advance directives

Differences Between a Checkup and Other Doctor Visits


Any chronic illnesses (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, or diabetes) or new symptoms (such as new pain or injury) are not covered by a checkup. Doctor visits for these conditions are sometimes called *acute visits*, *evaluation and management visits*, or *sick visits*. For patients who have chronic illnesses and are also due for a checkup, these items can sometimes be addressed at the same doctor visit, but medical insurance may be billed separately for them.

Routine Checkups Via Virtual Telehealth

Physical examinations may be part of a checkup but are not required for otherwise healthy individuals who do not have specific symptoms. During a telehealth checkup, a doctor can order blood work, screening tests, and immunizations, which patients can schedule and complete at a later date.

Routine checkups can help prevent illness and encourage a healthier lifestyle. Preventing illness or identifying a health condition early can also help lower overall health care costs.

What tests or procedures does a checkup include?

Measurements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Height • Weight • Blood pressure • Heart rate 	Screenings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Lung, cervical, colon, and breast cancer • Sexually transmitted infections
Blood tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholesterol • Fasting glucose or hemoglobin A_{1c} • Hepatitis C virus antibody 	Immunizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenza • Tetanus • Pneumonia • Shingles
 Special assessments for older individuals Fall risk, hearing loss, memory loss, and advance directives	

Are Routine Checkups Beneficial?

A study published in 2021 that reviewed available evidence showed that checkups were associated with increased cancer screening (such as for colon cancer and cervical cancer) and increased detection of chronic diseases (such as high blood pressure and depression). Checkups also may promote a healthier diet and more regular exercise as well as improve patients' self-rated health. While checkups appear to improve control of risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol, they are not associated with decreased death rates or decreased cardiovascular events such as heart attack and stroke.

Is a Yearly Checkup Necessary?

If you value a more personal relationship with your primary care physician, a yearly visit may be helpful. For people aged 65 years or older, who have chronic illnesses, or who are taking long-term medications, routine visits are important. People who are young and have no symptoms should talk to their doctor about the best schedule to maintain for checkups.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Harvard Health
www.health.harvard.edu/blog/ready-for-your-routine-medical-checkup-202107282555

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