



HEALTH CHECKUPS

WHEN YOU NEED THEM AND WHEN YOU DON'T

Like many people, you may schedule a yearly checkup or “annual physical” with your health professional. It usually includes a health history, physical exam and tests. It is important to have a regular health professional who helps make sure you receive the medical care that is best for your individual needs. But healthy people often don’t necessarily need annual physicals, and those checkups can do more harm than good. Here’s why:

ANNUAL PHYSICALS USUALLY DON’T MAKE YOU HEALTHIER

There have been many studies of the effects of annual checkups. In general, they probably won’t help you stay well and live longer. And usually they don’t help you avoid hospital stays or keep you from dying of cancer or heart disease.

TESTS AND SCREENINGS CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS

Most people should only have a test or exam if they have symptoms or risks factors.

One problem is getting a false-positive result. These false alarms can cause anxiety, and unnecessary follow-up tests and treatments. For example, a false-positive blood test can result in a biopsy. An electrocardiogram (ECG) that is not interpreted correctly may lead to another test that exposes you to radiation. Or you might get a procedure to show arteries in the heart that has a risk of heart attack or death in two patients for every 100 who get the test.

SET A SCHEDULE WITH YOUR HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

Your health professional best knows your health history. You can discuss with him/her the best time for any exams or tests, which you may need.

If your health professional wants to schedule an annual physical, you can ask if it is necessary. Or ask if you can wait until you have a problem or are due for a test (such as a cervical smear or blood pressure check).

SO WHEN DO ADULTS NEED A CHECKUP?

You may need a checkup:

- When you are sick
- When you have a symptom that could mean illness
- To manage chronic or ongoing conditions
- To check on the effects of a new medicine
- To help with risk factors like smoking or obesity
- For antenatal care, if you are pregnant
- For lifestyle issues like family planning
- For other reasons that are based on your individual needs.

People in their twenties often do not see a health professional for several years without risking their health, while older people who have developed risks for certain diseases may see a health professional more often. It is best to have a trusted health professional you see regularly who has access to your health records.



WHAT ABOUT PREVENTIVE CARE?

Preventive care is important. Having a regular health professional helps you get preventive care.

Everyone should get the recommended immunisations and screening tests at the times and frequencies recommended by the Ministry of Health.

Adapted from Choosing Wisely Canada (2014), Health checkups: when you need them – and when you don't.

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