

Milestone Medical Tests in your 60s and Up

You deserve to feel good. Just because you are over 60, don't think you can't be independent, vital and healthy. Just look at Sean Connery or Jane Fonda!

But do you know what to do to stay healthy? The United States Preventive Services Task Force has put together the following recommendations to keep seniors healthy, happy, and safe. These are simple tests that can be done or ordered when you visit your regular doctor. Your doctor may recommend additional tests based on your personal health profile.

- **Blood Pressure** . You could be one of millions of Americans who have this condition and don't know it. Get your blood pressure checked by your doctor at least once a year. Your heart, not to mention your arteries, brain, eyes, and kidneys, will thank you later.
- **Stepping on the Scales** . Welcome to the weight gain triple whammy: muscle is replaced by fat as we get older. Then, that fat goes to your waist! Also, you don't burn calories as well as before because your body's metabolism is slowing down. Take heed of any weight gain; you could be robbing yourself of good health.
- **The Rectal Exam** . Dread it, hate it, joke with your friends about it. Just make sure you get one -- every year. The rectal exam and a fecal occult blood test (FOBT) will tell if there are any masses or subtle bleeding that can not be seen with the naked eye. Along with other tests your doctor may recommend, it may give clues to treatable problems in your colon (think colon cancer) or prostate for men.
- **Other Colon Cancer Screening Tests** . Katie Couric got hers on national TV. Colonoscopy is just one of several tests that can be performed to look for colon cancer. A colonoscopy should be done every 10 years beginning at age 50. You may need to have a colonoscopy earlier and more frequently if you have risk factors. Talk to your doctor to see what's best for you.
- **For Women: Breast Exam and Mammogram** . Know this: breast cancer increases with age. Therefore, it's especially important for you to get that annual mammogram and doctor's breast exam. A mammogram is recommended every one to two years after the age of 40.
- **For Women: Pelvic Exam and Pap Smear** . You may think it's crazy, but many women over 60 still need to get regular pelvic exams and Pap smears. Women over 60 can get cervical cancer or vaginal cancer. And the pelvic exam can detect a host of other conditions that may affect your health and quality of life

(think incontinence!). Pap smears are recommended for women every three years. If a woman is over 65 years old and has had three negative pap smears in a row or has had a total hysterectomy, a pap smear can be omitted.

- **Protecting Your Eyes** . Eye diseases, such as macular degeneration and glaucoma, are common with age. Your eyes should be checked every one to two years after the age of 65. Screening can preserve and maximize your vision. Go more often if you have vision problems.
- **Hearing Test** . At least 30% of people over 60 have some hearing loss, most of which is treatable. Get a hearing test at least once every three years.
- **Protect Your Bones** . Osteoporosis is no joke. If you have it and you suffer a fracture -- especially of the hip -- you've significantly increased your risk of permanent disability or death. Get serious and ask your doctor to refer you for a bone density test. Women should have a bone density test at age 65. If a woman is at a higher risk, a screening test should be done at age 60.
- **Cholesterol Screening**. High cholesterol levels are a major reason why people have heart attacks and strokes. The good news, though, is that high cholesterol levels can be treated by diet and medications. That is why measuring your levels of total cholesterol and HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol) is important to do regularly.
- **Vaccinations** . People over 65 should get a pneumococcal vaccine to protect against pneumonia. Anyone over 50 should get a yearly flu shot. A tetanus booster is recommended every 10 years.

Also important, but not endorsed by the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force, are the following tests:

- **Blood Sugar** . Diabetes is a potentially life-threatening condition, but it doesn't have to be. The American Diabetes Association recommends that a fasting blood sugar test be done at least once every three years, so you can catch diabetes early and manage it.
- **Thyroid Hormone Test** . Thyroid problems are easily missed. That's why screening at least once every five years is important, especially for women, according to the American Thyroid Association. Your thyroid, that innocuous-looking gland in your neck is the body's powerhouse, producing hormones needed for metabolism. Problems with the thyroid can cause hair loss, weight gain or weight loss, fatigue, and depression.
- **Looking for Moles** . Remember this: Although the majority of your sun exposure occurred before age 18, skin cancers can take 20 years or more to develop. Luckily, most skin cancers are curable. The American Cancer Society

recommends regular screening. So don't forget to ask your doctor to check your skin for unusual moles or skin changes once a year.

- **Dental Exam.** Gum disease can be an important indicator of your overall health. Your teeth, gums, mouth, and throat need to be regularly examined by a dentist. Regular brushing with fluoride toothpaste and flossing is so important if you want to keep your pearly whites gleaming.

Don't forget that taking care of your health extends beyond visiting your doctor's office. The Task force recommends that you do the right thing not only for your health, but for others as well by:

- Exercising regularly and watching your diet.
- Not smoking, drinking alcohol excessively, or using drugs
- Wearing seatbelts with lap/shoulder straps
- Storing firearms safely
- Using smoke detectors
- Using a helmet on bicycles and motorcycles
- Practicing safe sex, using condoms
- Driving safely, no alcohol or drugs
- Setting hot water heaters at 120-130 degrees
- Learning CPR
- Being sensible, avoiding falls and injury
- Getting help for depression and anxiety

Medical screening tests are gifts that keep on giving -- you'll enjoy better health and you may add years to your life. So make a note to schedule a visit to your dentist and call your doctor each year around your birthday. These visits only take an hour or two of your time, and the results are priceless.

Courtesy: <http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/guide/milestone-medical-tests-60-up>