

Choosing Wisely Canada is a campaign to help physicians and patients engage in conversations about unnecessary tests, treatments and procedures, and to help physicians and patients make smart and effective choices to ensure high-quality care.

For more information on Choosing Wisely Canada or to see other patient materials, visit www.choosingwiselycanada.org.
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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 doctor. It usually includes a health history, physical exam and tests.

It is important to have a regular family doctor 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 check-ups can do more harm than good. Here's why:

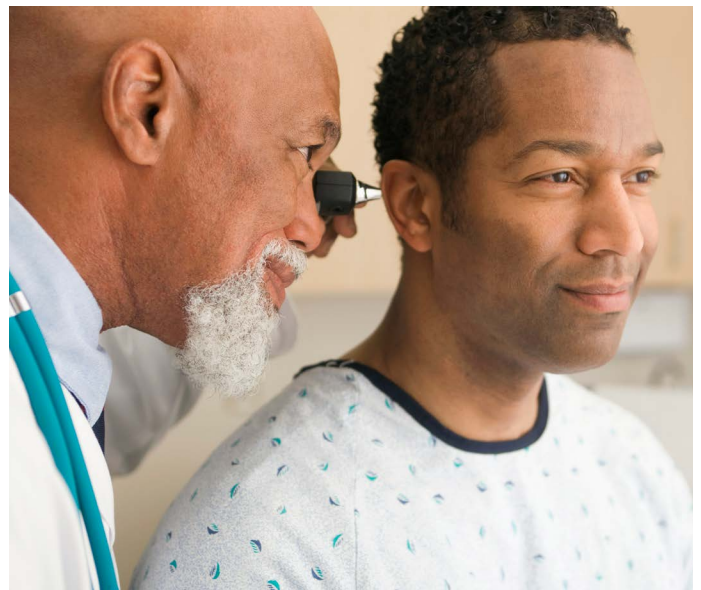
Annual physicals usually don't make you healthier.

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 family doctor.

Your doctor 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 doctor 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 Pap smear or blood pressure test).

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 prenatal 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 doctor for several years without risking their health, while older people who have developed risks for certain diseases may see a doctor more often. It is best to have a trusted doctor you see regularly who has access to your health records.

What about preventive care?

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

Everyone should get the recommended immunizations and screening tests at the times and frequencies as recommended by the Canadian Task Force on the Periodic Health Examination.

What tests can help?

The recommendations below are for healthy adults. If you have risk factors or a chronic disease, you may need different tests or you may need a test more often. Ask your doctor what schedule is right for you, but here are conditions many people should be screened for:

- High blood pressure
- Cervical cancer
- High cholesterol on men over 40 or women over 50 who have a low risk profile
- Diabetes
- Breast cancer
- Colon cancer
- Osteoporosis (weakened bones)
- Abdominal aortic aneurysm (enlarged blood vessel)

