

Preventive health screenings you need in 2024

By Landon Stevenson

Preventive health screenings are the foundation of early detection and intervention, which can make a world of difference in the quality and length of our lives.

In 2024, start the year right with an annual physical examination. This general checkup provides an overall assessment of your health status. Your doctor will measure your blood pressure, check your weight and discuss any health concerns or lifestyle changes that may affect your well-being. For Medicare enrollees, the Annual Medicare Wellness Visit is covered with no out-of-pocket cost for the patient.

Let's look at the preventive screenings you are most likely to need in 2024:

- Regular blood pressure checks are crucial for all adults to monitor and manage cardiovascular health. High blood pressure is a silent killer that may not produce any symptoms. Yet it can lead to heart disease, stroke and other serious health problems. Get your blood pressure checked annually.
- Elevated cholesterol levels can contribute to heart disease. Get your cholesterol checked regularly, especially if you have a family history of heart problems.
- Diabetes is a growing health concern, and early detection is key to managing the condition. Your doctor may recommend blood glucose tests or A1C measurements, depending on your risk factors.
- Cancer screenings are vital for early detection, which greatly improves treatment outcomes. Women over age 40 should have annual mammograms. Adults over age 45 should have a colonoscopy to check for colorectal cancer. Women should check with their healthcare provider about screening for cervical cancer. Pap tests usually are recommended to start at age 21. To prevent prostate cancer, men usually should start prostate-specific antigen testing at age 50, earlier if they have risk factors.
- Skin cancer is the most common cancer. If you have moles, freckles or a family history of skin cancer, consider annual skin checks from a physician. You may start skin checks at home by examining your partner's skin head to toe every few months.
- The importance of mental health cannot be overstated. Regular mental health checkups, along with open communication with your healthcare provider, can help identify and manage psychological concerns.
- Discuss bone density testing and vitamin D levels with your doctor to prevent osteoporosis and fractures. Bone health matters, especially as we age.
- Regular eye exams can catch vision problems and eye diseases early, helping to preserve your eyesight. Eye exams are essential for everyone, regardless of age.

- Semi-annual dental checkups maintain your oral health. These visits can help identify and prevent cavities, gum disease and oral cancer.

The start of a new year is the ideal time to take control of your health. Schedule the preventive screenings that fit your age, gender and risks for 2024.

Dr. Landon Stevenson, DO, a family physician at RiverStone Health Clinic, can be reached at 406-247-3306.