



AASPIRE

# Healthcare Toolkit

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## Staying Healthy: Preventive Care

### Contents

- What is this topic about?
- How do I know when I need preventive care?
- How might I schedule preventive care?
- I have a hard time tolerating some types of preventative care, what might I do?
- I have a really hard time with blood draws, what might I do?
- What are some other ways I can minimize risks to my health?
- Links

# Staying Healthy: Preventative Care

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## 1 What is this topic about?

Preventive care includes things that can help prevent a major health problem, or can help catch a health problem when it is still minor or easier to treat. Preventive care includes:

- Checking blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and weight
- Screening for cancers, such as cervical, breast, colon, prostate, and skin cancer
- Screening for other diseases like diabetes, osteoporosis, thyroid disease, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections
- Screening for mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety
- Screening for substance abuse such as alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse
- Asking about life situations that can affect health, such as domestic violence
- Getting vaccines to prevent conditions such as tetanus, the flu, or cervical cancer
- Getting eye exams, dental exams, and dental cleanings
- Getting advice about exercise, diet, or other things you can do to stay healthy

## 2 How do I know when I need preventive care?

What kinds of preventive care you need, and when you need them, will depend on your age and sex. The Mayo Clinic has a [tool](#) that gives a personalized list of recommended screenings based on your age and sex. The Centers for Disease Control have a number of [quizzes and schedules](#) for helping to figure out what vaccines are recommended based on your age and sex. Your healthcare provider can also help you figure out what kinds of preventive care you need and when.

You might ask, *"Am I due for any preventive care?"*

Whether or not it's a good idea to get certain kinds of preventive care isn't always an easy decision. If you're not sure what kinds of preventive care you need, or not sure if a certain kind of preventive care is right for you, discuss it with your healthcare provider.

## 3 How might I schedule preventive care?

Your primary care provider can talk to you about ways to keep yourself healthy and can help you decide what types of preventive care you need. Some types of preventive care (such as getting a tetanus shot) can happen during a normal office visit. Other types may need a special appointment (such as getting a Pap smear). Yet other types have to be done outside of the office and may need a referral from your provider (for example mammograms to screen for breast cancer or colonoscopies to screen for colon cancer).

See the section on "Making an Appointment" for detailed information on how to make an appointment with your primary care provider. When making an appointment, tell the office staff that you are interested in a preventive care visit. If you think you may need a Pap smear, also mention that to the office staff because many offices schedule longer visits for Pap smears.

Once you are at your visit, your provider can help you decide what preventive care you need and can give you referrals for tests that have to happen outside of the office. You can use the [After the Visit Worksheet](#) to help make sure you know how to follow up on these referrals. Your primary care provider can order vaccines for you and give them to you in the office. You can also get some vaccines, such as the flu vaccine, by going to local pharmacies or health fairs.

You will need to go to a dentist for preventive dental care (like getting your teeth cleaned) and to an optometrist for preventive eye care (like checking to see if you need glasses).

#### **4 I have a hard time tolerating some types of preventive care, what might I do?**

Many of the tips for being examined by your healthcare provider also apply to preventive care situations.

#### **5 I have a really hard time with blood draws, what might I do?**

If you have a very hard time with blood draws, here are some things that might be helpful.

- Ask your provider to only order blood tests when absolutely necessary and group them together to avoid having to get stuck more than once.
- Use a numbing spray or cream on your skin so that you can't feel the needle as much.
- Ask the person drawing blood to be very patient and use a calm voice.
- Ask to lie down or lean on something.

- Get a very detailed explanation of what will happen, including how many tubes of blood will be filled.
- Ask your healthcare provider if it would be a good idea to use an anti-anxiety medication before the blood draw.
- Ask the person drawing the blood to give you a lot of advance warning so you can prepare yourself emotionally.
- Have the person drawing the blood warn you before they stick the needle.
- Ask the person drawing the blood not to tell you when they will stick the needle.
- Bring something, or have someone do something, to distract you.

## **6 What are some other ways I can minimize risks to my health?**

Some other things that can be done to help prevent major health problems are:

- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise five or more times a week
- Do things you like and that make you happy every day
- Get enough rest and relaxation
- If you drink alcohol, don't have more than one alcoholic drink per day
- Don't do drugs
- Don't smoke cigarettes (here's some [information on quitting](#) if you do)
- Use seatbelts and helmets
- Use sunscreen or other protection from the sun

- If possible, avoid people who make you feel bad about yourself
- Find out how to get help if someone is scaring or hurting you. More information is available at [The Hotline](#).

## 7 Links

- [Mayo Clinic screening tool](#)
- [CDC schedules](#)
- Help for abuse at [The Hotline](#)