

Eleven Important Men's Health Tests

Staying on top of annual physicals can feel like a pain. Men are especially notorious for putting off key annual physicals that shed important insight into overall health. A handful of simple medical exams for men can detect serious illnesses early and help ensure a long, healthy life.

Fact: Men are 50% more likely to die of heart disease than women. That's why men need to have their blood pressure, cholesterol and heart rate measured annually. These tests can foresee heart problems down the road and allow men to make the lifestyle changes necessary to correct the problems.

In addition to heart problems, men are more likely to develop certain cancers later in life. But if you make it a point to schedule certain medical exams, doctors can usually catch these forms of cancer during more treatable stages.

Embrace the annual men's health checks from your family physician.

Wellness exams and health screenings for men

1. Blood pressure

High blood pressure — also known as hypertension — can lead to many problems because it means your heart is working harder than it should. With additional stress put on the heart, the likelihood of heart attack and stroke increases substantially.

Normal blood pressure is generally considered less than 120/80 mm. When medical providers test blood pressure, they use an inflatable arm cuff monitor. These arm cuffs measure the pressure of your contracting heart to pump blood (systolic) and the pressure between beats as your heart relaxes (diastolic).

Risk factors for high blood pressure include:

- A family history
- Being overweight
- Drinking too much alcohol
- High sodium diet
- Lack of physical activity
- Older age

Make sure to have your blood pressure tested as part of your annual health screens.

2. Heart rate, respiration rate, temperature and body mass index tests

OK, the next few tests are just as crucial for women as for men — but that doesn't make them any less critical. These key annual wellness exams can help detect the onset of heart problems. Here's a quick overview:

- **Heart rate:** A stethoscope is typically used to determine your resting heartbeat. Between 60-100 is considered normal. If more evaluation is needed, your provider may also recommend an EKG.
- **Respiration rate:** A provider will simply count the number of breaths per minute. Typically, 12-16 breaths a minute is normal, whereas 20 or more breaths might indicate heart or lung problems.
- **Temperature:** A thermometer measures temperature — 98.6 F is standard but can be slightly higher or lower and still be considered normal for you. 100.4 F is considered a fever for everyone.
- **Weight or body mass index (BMI):** Considering your height, weight and build, providers will determine whether you are at a healthy weight with the BMI scale. However, BMI is not 100% foolproof. A person with more muscle mass may have a high BMI. If your BMI is above 30, you meet the medical definition of obese.

3. Blood glucose testing

According to new research, men 35 and older who are overweight or obese should have their blood sugar levels tested regularly. This is due to the increased risk of heart disease associated with obesity, poor diet and lack of exercise. Abnormal blood sugar can indicate a higher risk for type 2 diabetes, as this test result means your body is failing to break down and utilize sugar as it should.

A provider can test blood sugar levels with one of two common men's health tests:

- **Hemoglobin A1C:** This blood test allows providers to diagnose type 1 and type 2 diabetes. The test measures the percentage of hemoglobin that is coated with sugar. At or above 5.7%-6.5% is considered abnormal.
- **The FGT (Fasting Glucose Test)** is a blood test taken after several hours of fasting that helps providers diagnose and screen for diabetes and prediabetes.

A fasting blood sugar level of 99 mg/dL or lower is normal, 100 to 125 mg/dL indicates you have prediabetes, and 126 mg/dL or higher indicates you have diabetes.

4. Cholesterol screen for men

It is recommended for men's health screening to have their cholesterol levels examined every five years. There are two kinds of cholesterol: HDL (high-density lipoproteins) and LDL (low-density lipoproteins). HDL is the good kind, whereas LDL is the bad kind of cholesterol.

Cholesterol can be examined via a blood test — healthy cholesterol measures between 125 mg/dl and 200 mg/dL. Certain factors like diabetes, smoking and a BMI over 30 mean a person should have their cholesterol tested more often than once every five years. Other risk factors for high cholesterol include a family history of high cholesterol, an unhealthy diet, and a sedentary lifestyle.

Your provider can also help suggest ways to improve your diet and add more physical activity to your day to improve your cholesterol levels.

5. Testicular cancer screening

During your annual healthcare visit, have a testicular cancer screening as an essential men's health test. Although self-exams help catch cancer, it's important to be examined by a healthcare provider. Men of any age can develop testicular cancer, although half of all cases are men aged 20-34.

Most doctors also recommend a monthly self-exam. When you're in a warm shower, you can feel your testicles for lumps. Typically, these lumps are painless. In addition, any new or significant swelling in one testicle should be evaluated by a provider or your PCP promptly.

6. Prostate cancer screening

A biopsy is the only way to know for sure if a person has prostate cancer. However, two tests allow providers to identify if the person is at high risk for prostate cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that men discuss prostate cancer screenings with providers for any health check over 50. Men with a family history of prostate cancer should also be screened as part of routine 40-year-old physical exams.

Prostate screenings start with risk assessment evaluations. Typically, the provider will begin with a digital exam of the prostate which involves inserting a gloved finger into the rectum to feel for bumps or irregularities.

The provider may also order a PSA blood test that checks for prostate antigen levels in the blood. A healthy level is considered under 4 NG/ML of blood.

Once again, this test is a risk or screening assessment, not a means of diagnosing prostate cancer. If the test is positive, a provider will typically order a biopsy — which involves extracting sample cells or tissues from the body.

7. Colorectal cancer screening

Some guidelines recommend colorectal cancer screenings after age 50; some recommend getting screenings done beginning at age 40. A colonoscopy is painless and only takes 15-20 minutes. The screening helps detect colon cancer and often will catch colon cancer in an early, treatable stage. Colon cancer is treatable in 90% of

cases if caught early. Diet, family history and lifestyle factors such as exercise, smoking, and alcohol use also can increase your likelihood of developing colon cancer.

How does it work? Medical professionals send a tiny camera (called a flexible sigmoidoscope) through your colon via the anus to observe for ulcers, polyps, tumors and bleeding. This is called a sigmoidoscopy. Although this health screening might not sound appealing, learning about colon cancer before it advances is much better.

8. Skin cancer screening

By age 65, men are more than twice as likely to develop melanoma as women. We recommend an annual examination by a dermatologist as a health screening for skin cancer. Also, be conscious of your skin and perform a self-exam once a month for moles that have changed in appearance or look abnormal. The most important warning sign of melanoma is a new spot on the skin or a spot that is changing in size, shape, or color. Another important sign is a spot that looks different from all of the other spots on your skin (known as the *ugly duckling sign*.) Some melanomas don't fit these rules. It's important to tell your doctor about any changes or new spots on the skin, or growths that look different from the rest of your moles.

9. STD screening and preventive care

If you are a sexually active male, regardless of sexual orientation, getting tested for STDs is one of the most important health screenings. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teens and those under 25 are especially at risk for contracting STDs, but anyone sexually active is at risk.

Many people don't know that you're not limited to specialty clinics for STD testing. In fact, you can walk into most urgent care centers for STD testing at any time.

Typically, you can find a screening test for the most common STDs, which include:

- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Only Hep B is considered an STI
- HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)
- Syphilis
- Trichomonas

HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) is now the #1 STI in the USA. This infection generally presents with no symptoms, although some people may experience warts on the genitals, mouth, or throat. Certain types of HPV can lead to cancer, such as cervical or oral cancer.

There is no treatment for HPV. Rather, the infection oftentimes clears up on its own. Still, it's important to receive regular STD testing if you are sexually active to learn if you have acquired this infection and if you have the strain (HPV 16 or HPV 18) that may lead to cancer.

The HPV vaccine can also protect men and women from this infection. It's most effective when given between the ages of 11 and 12, although older teens and young adults can also receive the vaccine. Generally, it's regarded as not effective if given to patients older than 26.

10. Check your lipids

Lipids, or fats in your blood, are more than just cholesterol. A lipid panel typically checks for three different types of cholesterol and blood triglycerides. While a lipid panel can indicate your risk for heart disease, it can also screen for other conditions such as pancreatitis, kidney disease or hypothyroidism. A full lipid panel should be part of any annual men's health screening.

11. Abdominal aortic aneurysm

AAA is the swelling of the primary blood vessel that leads away from the heart and into the abdomen, called the aorta. The aorta is the biggest blood vessel in the body.

Rarely the abdominal aorta can swell and rupture. This can lead to internal bleeding and, if undiagnosed or left untreated, can be fatal. Ruptures of the abdominal aorta account for 1 in 50 deaths in men over 65.

That's why men over 65 must be screened for an abdominal aortic aneurysm at their annual men's health check.

Men's health screening by age

The health screens you need depend on your age. Here is what is recommended for each age group:

Ages 18-39

- General health screening to address any concerns
- Every 2-3 years: Blood and urine tests, blood pressure checks
- EKG at 30 years old to establish a baseline
- Discuss STD testing with your provider

Ages 40-49

- General health screen to address any concerns
- Every 2 years: Blood tests, blood pressure checks
- Colorectal Cancer screening for age 45
- Discuss STD testing and prostate and testicular screens with your provider

Ages 50-65

- General health screen to address any concerns
- Every year: Blood tests, blood pressure checks, colon cancer screening
- Every 5-10 years: Sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy
- Discuss STD testing and prostate and testicular screens with your provider

Ages 65 and older

- General health screen to address any concerns
- Every year: Blood tests, blood pressure checks, colon cancer screenings
- Every 5-10 years: Sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy
- Discuss STD testing and prostate and testicular screens with your provider