Check-up checklist: Staying healthy at every age

Staying healthy is the best investment in your future, and early detection of illnesses is important as we get older. Our checklist provides a helpful guide to the regular medical checks we need at different ages.

Making time to fit in medical appointments when we feel fit and well can be inconvenient when our lives are already busy. While most of the check-ups are quick and painless, some are far from enjoyable. But putting up with some discomfort now is a small price to pay to help detect any serious medical issues in their early stages, when treatment is often simpler and more effective.

Regular medical checks are part of a healthy lifestyle for all of us, just like a balanced diet, regular exercise, and good sleep. The health checks we need change as we get older, and medical practice also evolves over time as new procedures and guidance are developed. Your GP is a great place to start for more information, and they can perform many of the check-ups themselves. Having a regular doctor you feel comfortable with and who knows your medical history is an important part of good health care.

This checklist is a guide to the different regular health checks we need during our adult lives. Some people may need earlier monitoring or more treatment, particularly if you have a family history of certain illnesses, other health conditions, or a higher risk level.

Everybody

- **Dental check-up** – Everybody should visit the dentist at least once a year for a clean and check-up.
- **Eye examination** – If you wear glasses or contact lenses, you should have an annual check-up with your optometrist. Otherwise, screening is recommended every two years to monitor your eye health and detect any vision changes.
- **Vaccinations** – Annual immunisation against the flu is recommended for everybody by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation.
- **STI screening** – Regular screening before unprotected sex with a new partner is important to protect yourself and the people close to you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as chlamydia.
- **Self-checks** – You know your body better than anybody else does. Regular self-examination is the first line of defence to identify changes that could indicate a medical issue.
  - Everybody should check their skin every 3 months for any changes, especially freckles or moles.
  - Each month, women should do a monthly breast check and men a testicle check.

If you do find something has changed, see your doctor.

Over 18

- **Blood pressure** – Your blood pressure should be checked at least every two years; if you have high blood pressure, more frequent monitoring may be required.
- **Cervical screening** – Women should be screened every five years from age 25 until 74. This follows a recent change to more accurate and less frequent testing, replacing the two-yearly pap smear.
- **Depression** – New mothers are screened for symptoms of depression via a questionnaire during pregnancy and shortly after giving birth, as part of a free service to improve mental health during this higher risk period.
- **Vaccinations** – A whooping cough booster is recommended for adults in close contact with infants who were last vaccinated 10 or more years ago.

Over 40

- **Diabetes** – Based on a risk assessment questionnaire, your blood sugar level may need to be checked from age 40 onwards. This occurs either annually or every three years, depending on your risk. If you have high blood pressure or are overweight, earlier screening may be required.
- **Heart disease and stroke** – From age 45 onwards, the Heart Foundation recommends you have a heart health check with your GP every two years. This involves a lifestyle assessment and checks of your cholesterol, blood pressure and kidney function.
Chronic illness check-up – People from 45 to 49 years old with a high risk of developing a chronic disease are eligible for a one-off check-up to help prevent and detect serious medical conditions.

Over 50

- **Bowel cancer** – The National Bowel Cancer Screening Program has been phased in to screen people over 50 for bowel cancer every two years. The test kit is sent to participants by mail and can be completed at home.

- **Breast cancer** – From 50 to 74, women should have a mammogram every two years. BreastScreen Australia provides free mammograms to women 40 and over.

- **Heart disease** – From 50 years of age, an electrocardiogram may be recommended every two to five years to detect potential heart abnormalities. This is a painless, non-invasive procedure.

- **Osteoporosis** – People over 50 who also have risk factors for osteoporosis should consider having a bone density scan. Risk factors include family history and other medical conditions, low levels of calcium and vitamin D, and lifestyle factors such as smoking.

- **Prostate cancer** – Routine testing for prostate cancer is no longer recommended by Australian health authorities. Men should talk to their GP about their risk, and seek medical advice for symptoms related to urination.

- **Vaccinations** – A tetanus, whooping cough and diphtheria booster is recommended at age 50 unless you’ve had a vaccination in the last 10 years.

Over 60

- **Eye examination** – Annual check-ups from age 65 onwards to identify any eye health issues such as glaucoma, cataracts, or macular degeneration.

- **Hearing** – Annual tests from age 65 onwards.

- **Vaccinations** – As we age, our immune systems become more vulnerable to infections, increasing the risk of suffering serious complications from certain illnesses. On top of that, immunity from childhood vaccinations gradually deteriorates over our lifetime. The following vaccinations are recommended to help increase protection:
  - Flu vaccination every year from age 65 onwards, which is available at no charge.
  - Tetanus, whooping cough and diphtheria booster at age 65.
  - Pneumococcal vaccination at age 65, which is available at no charge. Some people may need a further dose after five years.
  - Shingles vaccination is recommended for adults aged 60 and over. It’s free for people in their 70s.

Check-up checklist: Staying healthy at every age

This information is current as at September 2018. This article is intended to provide general information only and has been prepared without taking into account any particular person’s objectives, financial situation or needs ("circumstances"). This information is not a substitute for independent professional advice. Before acting on such information, you should consider its appropriateness, taking into account your circumstances and obtain your own independent financial, legal or tax advice. You should read the relevant Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) before making any decision about a product. While all care has been taken to ensure the information is accurate and reliable, to the maximum extent the law permits, ClearView and its related bodies corporate, or each of their directors, officers, employees, contractors or agents, will not assume liability to any person for any error or omission in this material however caused, nor be responsible for any loss or damage suffered, sustained or incurred by any person who either does, or omits to do, anything in reliance on the information contained herein.