

Cancer Free at Any Age: Checklist for Your Next Checkup

According to the latest report from the Health Information National Trends Survey, most Americans are not aware of how often they should see a doctor for cancer screening exams, such as mammograms and colonoscopies. Screening exams allow cancers to be diagnosed at the earliest stages and treated when treatment will be the most effective. The screening guidelines below offer recommended timing for specific ages, genders, and cancers.

Every Age

- Keep an eye on your skin and check for changes in moles, freckles, and other marks on your skin once a month.
- Women should conduct regular breast self-exams, know how their breasts normally feel, and report any changes to their physician.

20s

- Women should begin checking their breasts for lumps every month and have a clinical breast exam every 1-3 years.
- Women with an increased risk of breast cancer should discuss beginning screenings earlier with their doctors.
- All women should have a Pap smear to screen for cervical cancer at least once every year beginning at age 21 or approximately three years after a woman begins having sexual intercourse, whichever comes first, regardless of whether they have received the HPV vaccine.

30s

- Women should have a clinical breast exam and Pap smear every 1-3 years.
- Women in their 30s with three consecutive normal Pap smears may limit screenings to every two or three years.
- Women with an unusually high lifetime risk for breast cancer (greater than 20 percent) associated with defined genetic profiles should discuss with their physician the use of MRI for screening.

40s

- Women age 40 and older should begin having an annual mammogram.
- Women should continue to have an annual clinical breast exam, Pap smear, and if recommended by their doctor, an MRI screening.
- Men with a high risk of prostate cancer (African American men and those with a family history of the disease) should begin screenings at age 45.
- Men with even higher risk of prostate cancer should begin testing at age 40.
- Men and women with increased risk factors for colorectal cancer should discuss beginning screenings earlier than the normal age 50 with their doctors.

50s

- Women should continue to have an annual clinical breast exam, mammogram, Pap smear, and if recommended by their doctor, an MRI screening.
- Beginning at age 50, both men and women should begin screening for colorectal cancer with one of the options below:
 - Annual fecal occult blood tests (FOBT) or fecal immunochemical tests (FIT), which can detect small amounts of blood in stool samples, along with a flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years.
 - Every five years, a flexible sigmoidoscopy, an internal examination of the rectum and lower colon for polyps.
 - Every five years, a double contrast barium enema, an X-ray study of the colon and rectum to detect polyps.
 - Every 10 years, a colonoscopy, the only test that directly examines the entire colon.
- Beginning at age 50, men should have the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and a digital rectal examination (DRE) annually to screen for prostate cancer.

Sources: Texas Oncology, American Cancer Society, and National Cancer Institute.

