

Staying Healthy at 50+ Put Prevention Into Practice

What Checkups, Tests, and Shots Do You Need ?

All of the checkups, tests, and shots covered in this booklet have been proven effective in preventing disease, according to scientific evidence.

Regular Checkups and Care

Teeth and Gums

- Visit your dentist once or twice a year for checkups.
- Brush after meals with a toothbrush that has soft or medium bristles.
- Use toothpaste with fluoride.
- Use dental floss every day.
- Eat fewer sweets, especially between meals.
- Do not smoke or chew tobacco products.



Brush your teeth with toothpaste that contains fluoride

Keep track of when you need your next dentist appointment.

Hearing

Hearing loss is one of the most common health problems. Because it doesn't cause pain and is not visible, many people refuse to admit that it exists.



Hearing loss increases after the age of 50. How can you tell if you have a hearing problem? You may have to strain to hear a normal conversation. Or you may find yourself turning up the volume of the TV and radio so loud that others complain.

Talk to your doctor or nurse about your hearing. They may suggest a hearing test. Hearing aids can often help you hear better.

Have your hearing tested.

Vision

People aged 45 and older are most affected by vision problems. By age 65, you should see an eye doctor for regular eye exams. Eyeglasses or contact lenses can improve your vision. Doctors also have other methods to improve your vision and prevent you from losing your sight.



Have regular eye exams

Ask your doctor:

- How often do I need to have my eyes checked?

Keep track of when you need your next eye doctor appointment.

Glaucoma

After age 45, glaucoma becomes more common than it is earlier in life. It is a disease that can lead to problems seeing and even to loss of vision. Early treatment—with medicine, surgery, or both—can prevent or delay the serious vision problems caused by glaucoma.

You are more likely to get glaucoma, and you should see an eye doctor for a glaucoma test, if you:

- ◆ Have diabetes.
- ◆ Have a family history of glaucoma.
- ◆ Are over age 65.
- ◆ Are over age 40 and African American.

Tests To Catch Diseases or Conditions Early

Blood Pressure



Have your blood pressure checked frequently

High blood pressure can lead to heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease. It is most common in African Americans and people over age 45. Scientific evidence has shown that eating healthy foods and being active are two ways you can keep your blood pressure under control. See the sections “Eating Right” on page 8 and “Physical Activity” on page 10 for more information. Some people need to take medicine to keep their blood pressure at healthy levels. If you take medicine, be sure to talk to your doctor about how to take it. Do not skip any doses of medicine.

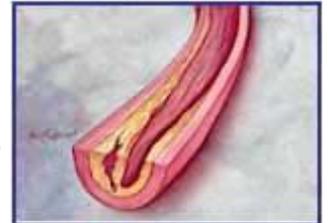
Ask your doctor:

- How often should I have my blood pressure checked?
- What should my blood pressure be?

Keep track of your blood pressure.

Cholesterol

Too much cholesterol, which can clog your blood vessels, is a major cause of heart disease in men and women. Cholesterol levels start to increase in middle-aged men, in women just before menopause, and in people who have gained weight. The risk of heart disease starts to increase in middle-aged men and women.



Cholesterol builds up in blood vessels

Research shows that you can lower your cholesterol level and keep a healthy level by eating the right foods, losing extra weight, and being physically active. See the sections “Eating Right” on page 8 and “Physical Activity” on page 10 for more information. Your doctor or other health care provider may suggest you take medicine to lower your cholesterol.



Most experts recommend checking your cholesterol every 5 years. Your health care provider may suggest you have it checked more often, especially if your cholesterol is too high.

Have your cholesterol checked

Ask your health care provider:

- How often should I have my cholesterol checked?
- What is a healthy cholesterol level for me?

If you have high cholesterol, talk with your doctor about a plan for lowering it.

Keep track of your cholesterol level.

Diabetes (High Blood Sugar)

Diabetes can lead to problems with vision, kidneys, and how well your blood circulates, especially to the lower legs and feet. Most people who have diabetes have type 2 diabetes, the kind that tends to come in middle age. Finding and treating diabetes early can cut your risk for these problems.



Check your own blood sugar level

The chances of getting the most common type of diabetes—type 2 diabetes— increase once you reach age 45. Almost 1 in 5 people aged 65-74 has diabetes.

You may need a blood test for diabetes if you:

- Have a family member with diabetes.
- Are overweight.
- Have had diabetes during pregnancy.

If You Have Diabetes

Ask your health care provider when you need checkups, tests, and vaccines:

- Eye and dental exams.
- Blood pressure and cholesterol checks.
- Blood sugar (glucose) checks.
- Yearly flu shots.

Ask your health care provider about ways to prevent problems:

- ◆ What is the right weight for me? Try to stay at that weight.
- ◆ What kinds and amounts of food are right for me?
- ◆ If you take medicine for diabetes:
How much medicine should I take?
When should I take it?
- ◆ If you smoke: What can I do that will help me stop smoking?
- ◆ How should I take care of my feet? How do I check for loss of feeling in my feet? If there is loss of feeling, you should report it to your doctor.

Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is a growing problem in the United States, especially among older people. It is an infection that affects the lungs and eventually other parts of the body. This infection can be passed from one person to the next. It is treated more easily if caught early.



You are at greater risk for TB and may need a TB test (called a PPD) if you have:

- Been in close contact with someone who has TB.
- Recently moved from Asia, Africa, Central or South America, or the Pacific Islands.
- Kidney failure, diabetes, HIV, or alcoholism.
- Injected or now inject illegal drugs.

Tests To Find Cancers

Breast Cancer

As women get older, their chances of getting breast cancer increase. In fact, most breast cancers occur in women over the age of 50.

Research shows that the best way to find breast cancer is to get a mammogram. This is an X-ray test that can find a breast cancer when it is so small that it cannot be felt. Most breast cancers are treated more easily when found early.



Mammogram

All women aged 50 and older should have a mammogram every 1 to 2 years. This recommendation is based on scientific evidence. Ask your doctor how often you need a mammogram. Make sure to tell your doctor if your mother or a sister has had breast cancer. If so, you may need to have mammograms more often than other women. Your doctor may also examine your breasts.

Ask your doctor:

- ◆ How often do I need a mammogram?

Keep track of your mammograms. .

Cancer of the Cervix

All sexually active women are at risk for cancer of the cervix. Most deaths from cancer of the cervix can be prevented if the cancer is found and treated early. A Pap test can find cancer of the cervix early—while it's easier to cure. This simple test saves lives.

Based on scientific evidence, women need to have a Pap test every 3 years, some more often. Set a date with your doctor to get a Pap test.

Your doctor may suggest stopping Pap tests if:

- You are over age 65 and have had regular, normal Pap tests.
- You have had a hysterectomy.

Tell your doctor if you have had genital warts, a sexually transmitted disease (STD), multiple sex partners, or abnormal Pap tests. If so, you may need Pap tests more often than other women.

Ask your doctor:

- ◆ How often do I need a Pap test?

Keep track of your Pap tests.

Colon Cancer

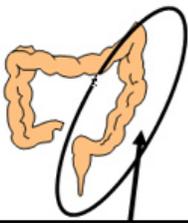
Colon cancer is the second leading cause of death from cancer. Older men and women are more likely to get colon cancer than those who are younger. But if caught early, colon cancer can be treated more easily. Effective tests are available to find colon cancer. However, many people do not take advantage of these tests. Starting at age 50, you should have tests to detect colon cancer. This advice is based on scientific research. The tests you may have are:

Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)—To test for small amounts of blood in your stool. This test should be done yearly.



FOBT is easy and is done at home. You use special cards

Sigmoidoscopy—To look inside the rectum and colon using a small, lighted tube. Your doctor will do this in the office or clinic. This test should be done once every 5 to 10 years. Tell your doctor if you have had polyps or if you have family member(s) with cancer of the colon, intestine, breast, ovaries, or uterus. If so, you may need to be tested more often.



Portion of Colon seen with Flexible Sigmoidoscopy

Ask your doctor:

- ◆ How often do I need these tests? Keep track of your tests.

Oral Cancer

Oral cancer includes cancers of the lip, tongue, pharynx, and mouth. Most oral cancers occur in people over age 40 who use tobacco or alcohol. People who are in the sun a lot also are at risk for cancer of the lip.

If you chew or smoke tobacco and drink a lot of alcohol, you may want your dentist to examine your mouth for signs of oral cancer during your regular dental checkup. You may also need to see your dentist more often.



Chewing tobacco can cause oral cancer.

Scientific evidence shows that you can help prevent oral cancer by not smoking and cutting back on the amount of alcohol you drink. If you are outdoors a lot, you should use a sun block on your lips.

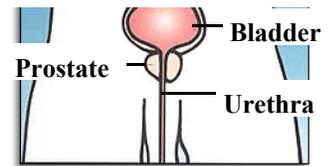
Ask your health care provider:

- ◆ How often should I get dental checkups?

Keep track of your dental visits.

Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is most common in men over age 50, in African Americans, and in men with a family history of prostate cancer.



Tests such as a rectal exam and PSA (prostate specific antigen) blood test can help detect prostate cancer. Based on research, it is not yet clear whether these tests save lives.

Ask your doctor:

- ◆ What are the pros and cons of tests for prostate cancer?

Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. Most skin cancers can be cured, especially if they are found and treated early.

You may need to have your doctor examine your skin if:

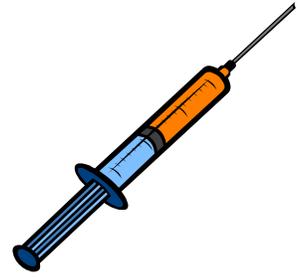
- You have many moles (large freckles).
- You have been in the sun a lot.

Ways to help prevent skin cancer:

- Limit the amount of time you spend in the sun, especially between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.
- Wear clothing that protects you from the sun.

Shots To Prevent Diseases

Adults need shots to prevent serious diseases. You should ask your doctor or other health care provider which shots are right for you.



Influenza (flu) shots

Everyone over age 65 needs this every year.

You may need flu shots before age 65 if you:

- Have lung, heart, or kidney disease.
- Have diabetes.
- Have AIDS or are infected with HIV.
- Have cancer.
- Are a health care worker

Pneumococcal (pneumonia) shot

Everyone needs this once at about age 65. If you have diseases of the lung, heart, or kidney; diabetes; HIV; or cancer, you may need this shot before age 65.

Tetanus-diphtheria shot

Everyone needs this every 10 years. Keep track of the shots you receive. Use the shot charts on pages 56-59.

Hepatitis B shots

Discuss with your doctor whether you need hepatitis B shots.

Generally, you should receive hepatitis B shots if you:

- Or your partner have had other sexual partners within the last 6 months.
- Are a male and have had sex with another male.
- Have had a sexually transmitted disease (STD) within the last 6 months.
- Have injected illegal drugs.
- Are a health care worker who is often exposed to blood or blood products.
- Had blood transfusions between 1978 and 1985.
- If you are traveling outside the United States, discuss with your doctor whether you need hepatitis B shots.

Ask for the handout **Staying Healthy at 50+ Putting Prevention Into Practice: Personal Prevention Charts**. It's an easy way to keep track of what checkups, tests and shots you've had and which ones you need to ask your provider about.

This material was adapted from the booklet Staying Healthy at 50+ Putting Prevention into Action developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ, formerly the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research), AARP, and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

AHRQ is the lead Federal agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, and broaden access to essential services.

AARP is the Nation's leading organization for people age 50 and older. It serves their needs and interests through information and education, advocacy, and community services, which are provided by a network of local chapters and experienced volunteers throughout the country. The organization also offers members a wide range of special benefits and services, including *Modern Maturity* magazine and the monthly *Bulletin*.