

Take Steps to Lower Your Risk for Cancer

Follow the tips below to help lower your risk for cancers

- ❑ **Avoid smoking**—Avoid smoking or being around others who smoke. Ask your doctor for tips to help you or loved ones stop smoking.
- ❑ **Protect your skin from the sun**—Use sun screen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15 when you're outside. Also, wear long sleeves, a hat, and sunglasses to get the most protection.
- ❑ **Avoid drinking too much alcohol**—Limit alcohol to one drink a day for women. Men should limit to one or two drinks a day.
- ❑ **Eat plenty of healthy foods**—A healthy diet includes mostly foods that have a lot of fiber and vitamins.
- ❑ **Exercise often**—Be active for at least 30 minutes, five days a week. Talk to your doctor about an exercise plan that's best for you.
- ❑ **Know your family history**—Talk to your family about cancers that run in your family. Share this information with your doctor. Ask your doctor about genetic testing.
- ❑ **Have regular check-ups and cancer screenings**—Go to all scheduled doctor's visits. Follow your doctor's advice on cancer screenings.

Talk to your doctor or Health Management Nurse for more tips on lowering your risk for cancer.

In addition to cancer screenings...

There are other health screenings to help you stay as healthy as possible. Talk to your doctor about health screenings. You can also visit <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/recommendations.htm> for more information.



QUESTIONS? NEED MORE INFORMATION? NEED TO UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION?

Call us toll-free at 1-800-948-2497

This CareConnections newsletter was reviewed for medical accuracy by Andrew Krueger, MD, FACP.

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SHARING KNOWLEDGE FOR BETTER HEALTH

MAY 2014

The Facts about Cancer Screenings

Did you know cancer screening tests can help find cancers early? You may already know which cancer screenings you need and when to get them. If so, stick to that schedule. If you don't know about cancer screening, ask your doctor if you need any tests. In the meantime, we have some facts about cancer screening for you. You can also share this information with your friends and family.

Cancer screening is one way to help find cancer early, before symptoms show. By the time there are symptoms, the cancer may have spread to different parts of the body. This is one of the reasons why cancer screening is done—to find cancer early when treatment is likely to work best. When cancer is found later, it may be harder to treat or cure.

Cancer screening can be both a physical examination and a test. These may include:

- ▶ **Physical exam and medical history**—A check-up done by the doctor for signs of cancer. For example, your doctor may feel for lumps, check for a sore that doesn't heal, or ask about any changes in your bowel movements. Your doctor may also ask about how you take care of your health and any medical conditions or treatments you've had.



If you don't know about cancer screening, ask your doctor if you need any tests.

- ▶ **Laboratory tests**—Tests done on samples from different parts of the body, such as blood, urine, or skin.
- ▶ **Imaging**—Taking pictures of areas inside the body.
- ▶ **Genetic tests**—Tests that look for gene mutations (changes in information passed from your parents that decide, for example, your eye color) that are linked to some types of cancer.

Keep in mind that when your doctor suggests a cancer screening, it doesn't mean you have cancer. Also, cancer screening is not used to diagnose cancer. If a screening test finds a problem, more tests may be done to confirm if it's cancer or something else.

Talk to your doctor or Health Management Nurse to learn more about cancer screening.

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Things to Consider about Cancer Screening

For many people, a visit to the doctor can be stressful. This is especially true when you need to discuss medical tests. Planning ahead can help make your visit a little easier. Bring a list of questions. This can help you stay organized and get the information you need.

You may want to ask the doctor the following questions about cancer screening:

- ▶ Which cancer screenings are right for me? Why?
- ▶ Are there any dangers or side effects from any of these screenings?
- ▶ When should I start getting them?
- ▶ How often should I get them?
- ▶ How much will they cost? Will my health insurance pay for them?
- ▶ Do I need to do anything ahead of time to prepare?
- ▶ What can I expect during the screening? Will it hurt?

- ▶ How long will the screening last? Will I need to miss work or school?
- ▶ How will I feel after the screening? Will I need some one with me?
- ▶ How long will it take to get the results? Who will contact me with the results?
- ▶ If the results show a problem, what are the next steps?
- ▶ What if I choose not to get the screening?

Some other questions about cancer you may want to ask include:

- ▶ What is my risk for getting cancer?
- ▶ What can I do to reduce my risk for getting cancer?
- ▶ Are there any warning signs of cancer I should know about?

Remember, your Health Management Nurse can also answer some of the questions you may have about cancer screening.

Common Cancer Screenings

One person may need a cancer screening that another person doesn't. But there are some screenings that doctors suggest to many of their patients. Here are three common cancer screenings among many others that you may want to know more about. These screenings are recommended by the **USPSTF (United States Preventive Services Task Force)**, a group of medical experts.

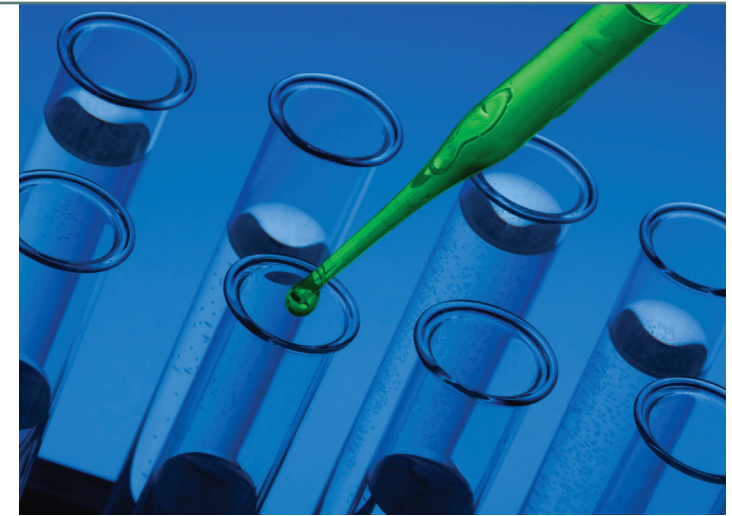
Breast Cancer Screening

Doctors believe a mammogram is the best way to catch breast cancer early. A mammogram is a picture of the breast made with x-rays. Women between 50 and 74 years of age should get a mammogram every two years. The USPSTF suggests women between 40 and 49 years of age should talk to their doctor to see how often they should get a mammogram.

Every woman should talk with her doctor about risk factors for breast cancer and the need for mammograms. So talk to your doctor about when it is right to start getting mammograms and how often to repeat them.

Colorectal Cancer Screening

- ▶ **Colorectal screening** includes checking the colon and rectum, the lower parts of your gut. For men and women without other risk factors, between 50 and 75 years of age, there are three common options to screen for colorectal cancer.
- ▶ **Colonoscopy** every 10 years. **Colonoscopy** (koe-lunn-ah-skuh-pee) is a screening done by a doctor to see inside the rectum and the entire colon. The patient is usually asleep during this test.
- ▶ **Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)** once a year. This test looks for tiny amounts of blood in a bowel movement sample.
- ▶ **FOBT every three years and sigmoidoscopy every five years.** **Sigmoidoscopy** (sihg-moyd-ah-skuh-pee) is a screening done by a doctor to see inside the rectum and the lower part of the colon. The patient is usually awake during this test.



One person may need a cancer screening that another person doesn't.

Your doctor may suggest a different screening schedule if you have other risk factors for colorectal cancer. For example, having a medical condition, such as **ulcerative colitis** (uhl-ser-uh-tihv kuh-lye-diss), **Crohn's** (kronz—rhymes with bones) disease, or **cystic fibrosis** (siss-tick fi-bro-siss), may increase a person's risk for getting colorectal cancer. You and your doctor can decide together which options are best for you.

Cervical Cancer Screening

Two tests are used to screen for cervical cancer by taking a sample of cells from the cervix (lower part of the uterus or womb) during an office visit:

- ▶ **Pap smear**—This test looks for certain changes in cells from the cervix. These changes may suggest that cancer could develop in the future.
- ▶ **HPV test**—This test looks for a type of **HPV (human papillomavirus)** [pap-ih-low-muh-vye-riss]). Cervical cancer can be caused by this virus.

Women between 21 to 65 years of age (who have a cervix) should get a Pap smear every three years. Another option for women between 30 to 65 years of age is to get a Pap smear and HPV test every 5 years.

Some women may not have to be screened. Others may need to be screened more often or at an earlier age. Talk with your doctor about your risk factors. This will help set a screening schedule that's right for you.

There may be other cancer screenings your doctor may suggest. Visit <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/adultrec.htm#cancer> to learn more about different cancer screenings.

What Is a Cancer Risk Factor?

A **cancer risk factor is anything that increases the chances of getting cancer.** Doctors look at a person's cancer risk factors to decide if certain screenings should be done.

It's not always clear why one person gets cancer and another doesn't. If a person has a risk factor, it doesn't always mean they'll get cancer. Also, there are people who get cancer who don't appear to have a risk factor. But research shows a person's odds of getting cancer are higher if they have certain risk factors.

You may not be able to control some of these risk factors, such as family history. But the good news is that you can control many of the other ones. You can help protect yourself by avoiding risk factors whenever possible.

Some common risk factors for cancers include:

- ▶ smoking
- ▶ having had cancer in the past
- ▶ having two or more relatives (a parent, brother, or sister) who have had cancer
- ▶ being older
- ▶ getting too much direct sunlight without sunscreen
- ▶ taking certain medicines
- ▶ drinking alcohol
- ▶ not eating enough healthy foods, not being physically active, or being overweight

Talk to your doctor if you think you have any of these risk factors.

