



Essential Screening Tests Every Man Needs

Why Screening Tests Are Important

Getting the right screening test at the right time is one of the most important things a man can do for his health. Screenings find diseases early, before you have symptoms, when they're easier to treat. Early colon cancer can be nipped in the bud. Finding diabetes early may help prevent complications such as vision loss. The tests you need are based on your age and risk factors. Below are several tests that are very important for males to consider.

Prostate Cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer found in American men after skin cancer. It tends to be a slow-growing cancer, but there are also aggressive, fast-growing types of prostate cancer. Screening tests can find the disease early, sometimes before symptoms develop, when treatments are most effective. Screenings for healthy men may include a digital rectal exam (DRE) and possibly a prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test. Government guidelines recommend against the routine use of the PSA test. The American Cancer Society advises each man to talk with a doctor about the risks and possible benefits of the PSA test. Discussions should begin at:

- 50 for average-risk men.
- 45 for men at high risk. This includes African-Americans.
- 40 for men with a strong family history of prostate cancer.

Colorectal Cancer

Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of death from cancer. Men have a slightly higher risk of developing it than women. The majority of colon cancers slowly develop from colon polyps: growths on the inner surface of the colon. After cancer develops, it can invade or spread to other parts of the body. The way to prevent colon cancer is to find and remove polyps before they turn cancerous. Screening begins at age 50 in average-risk adults. A colonoscopy is a common test for detecting polyps and colorectal cancer. A doctor views the entire colon using a flexible tube and a camera. Polyps can be removed at the time of the test.

Testicular Cancer

This uncommon cancer develops in a man's testicles, the reproductive glands that produce sperm. Most cases occur between ages 20 and 54. The American Cancer Society recommends that all men have a testicular exam when they see a doctor for a routine physical. Men at higher risk (a family history or an undescended testicle) should talk with a doctor about additional screening. Some doctors advise regular self-exams.



Skin Cancer

The most dangerous form of skin cancer is melanoma. It begins in specialized cells called melanocytes that produce skin color. Older men are twice as likely to develop melanoma as women of the same age. Men are also 2-3 times more likely to get non-melanoma basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers than women are. Your risk increases as lifetime exposure to sun and/or tanning beds accumulates; sunburns accelerate risk. The American Cancer Society and the American Academy of Dermatology recommend regular skin self-exams to check for any changes in marks on your skin including shape, color, and size. A skin exam by a dermatologist or other health professional should be part of a routine checkup.

High Blood Pressure (Hypertension)

The risk for high blood pressure increases with age. It's also related to weight and lifestyle. High blood pressure can lead to severe complications without any prior symptoms, including an aneurysm. But it can be treated. When it is, you may reduce your risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure. The bottom line: Know your blood pressure. If it's high, work with your doctor to manage it.

Cholesterol Levels

A high level of LDL cholesterol in the blood causes sticky plaque to build up in the walls of the arteries. This increases your risk of heart disease. Atherosclerosis -- hardening and narrowing of the arteries -- can progress without symptoms for many years. Over time it can lead to heart attack and stroke. Lifestyle changes and medications can reduce this "bad" cholesterol and lower the risk of cardiovascular disease. Starting at age 20, men should be screened if they are at increased risk for heart disease. Starting at 35, men need regular cholesterol testing.