

What You Don't Know About Your Yearly Physical

By [Jenna Birch](#) , January 15, 2016

When you are young and healthy, it is easy to shrug off that annual physical with your doctor. If you are not sick, exercise regularly and keep healthy eating habits, why would you need to schedule an appointment?

Nearly 45 million Americans head to their primary-care doctors in the absence of imminent concerns from the common cold to unexplained pain. The yearly physical has been the healthcare standard since early in the 20th century, helping doctors and their patients keep tabs on overall health.

Over the past several years, some studies have emerged that call into question the effectiveness of the practice but there are plenty of reasons to head to your doctor once a year for a quick check-in, especially if you know why you are going and use that time wisely.

Reasons to Have an Annual Physical

1. Health insurance companies want you to get that physical, which is why it is generally covered. Treating an issue is much more costly than preventing it.
2. A yearly physical helps you maintain a strong relationship with your primary-care doctor, outside of a major crisis or illness.
3. You can ask questions there that you may miss if you are also dealing with a bout of the flu or a sinus infection.
4. Your doctor checks your vital signs which includes your blood pressure, this is as important as it is simple. Detecting hypertension early can improve your overall well-being and energy levels; safeguarding your risk of long-term.
5. Your doctor evaluates for 5 factors that dramatically increase your chances of heart attack and stroke, hypertension, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol and family history. If you are high risk a plan of care will be developed to help you make changes in your lifestyle and health habits.

6. You will generally have a round of routine lab tests, a complete blood count, a lipid panel, and urinalysis to make sure your values fall within normal ranges.
7. If you have never had an annual physical, your first set of tests help establish a baseline to serve as your *personal* “normal.”
8. You can bring up any medication or supplement questions with your doctor, in case changes need to be made to your existing regimen.

How to Get the Most Out of Your Annual Appointment

Your yearly physical is a great time to ask what you should do if you get a migraine you can't shake, or mention that tiny knot in your shoulder that doesn't feel quite right. Despite recent buzz to the contrary, physicals aren't obsolete.

Perhaps most importantly, yearly appointments help you build a rapport with your primary-care physician. If you have an existing medical condition that requires a few checkups per year already, you may not need to schedule an annual physical but if you haven't seen your doctor in years, it is time to schedule in some face time.

Remember to use the time you have with your doctor to ask questions about your personal health, to check up on any concerns and to develop a plan to attain and maintain your personal health.

Sources:

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