

Speak Up™ to Prevent Serious Illness

When it comes to your health, you often may fall into the mindset that unless you are having signs or symptoms of an ailment, you can put off going to see your doctor and skip yearly exams or tests.

But preventive care — such as blood tests, cancer screens, mental health check-ins, vaccinations, and tests for genetic conditions — may help keep you from developing serious illness, reaching a crisis point with your health, or having to receive care at the hospital.



Preventive care includes:

- Ways to prevent illnesses from occurring, such as with vaccinations.
- Detection services, like blood tests or cancer screens, to find the first stages of a disease so treatment can begin.
- Care strategies, including rehabilitation and physical therapy, to reduce the effects of a disease or ailment.



Specific preventive services can include:

- Blood and genetic tests for cholesterol levels, diabetes, hepatitis, kidney disease, thyroid disease, sickle cell anemia, and dietary deficiencies and other abnormalities.
- Cancer screenings, such as mammograms or colonoscopies.
- Physical exams to check for high blood pressure, an irregular heart rate, and significant weight loss or gain. Any of these may be a sign of the onset of a health problem.
- Mental health screenings for depression or emotional distress.
- Counseling services for stopping alcohol, tobacco, or drug use.
- Vaccinations for annual illnesses like the flu and other serious illnesses such as measles, polio, and meningitis.



Your doctor can decide what tests or treatments you should get to prevent or lessen the chance for future illnesses. These may vary based on your:

- Age
- Gender
- Race



- Genetics
- Mental health
- Physical health



Get past the barriers

There are many reasons people avoid going to the doctor's office. They may think they are healthy, that nothing serious is wrong, that there is too much going on in life and there is no time. But with a little research, you can overcome these barriers.

Cost: Some insurance plans — including those under the Affordable Care Act marketplace — provide full or partial coverage for preventive care services like vaccinations or screenings. Find out what your insurance will or will not cover before receiving care.

Childcare needs: Find out if any organizations in your area have free childcare while you are at a medical appointment.

Emotional: Many people struggle with anxiety, depression, or another mental health challenge during their lives. If you are experiencing this, you are not alone. Do not be afraid to tell your doctor that you are struggling

Physical: A 2017 study found that people with disabilities are less likely to get preventive healthcare services. Forgoing these services may lead to worsened problems down the road. If you have a disability, ask for assistance in overcoming any barriers to accessing and receiving preventive care.

Lifestyle: Find out if your insurance plan covers gym memberships, alcohol and drug counseling programs, or smoking cessation aids to help you live a healthier lifestyle.

Transportation: If you do not drive or have someone who can take you to your medical appointment, find out if your insurance plan reimburses you for public transportation or ridesharing services to get there, or check to see if there are any coupons available to use those services. Seniors also may have access to transportation through their medical center, or local charities and programs.

Other resources:

- [HealthCare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov): Health benefits and coverage for preventive health services.
- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion](https://www.hhs.gov/odphpa): Resources for preventive care.
- [Speak Up™ Against Discrimination](https://www.speakupcampaign.org): This campaign educates patients on how to become active in their care, including steps they can take if they feel they are being discriminated against or not listened to by their caregivers.

Don't put off taking care of yourself. By investing in your health early, it will pay dividends later. Speak Up to prevent serious illness.

The goal of Speak Up™ is to help patients and their advocates become active in their care.

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