

Guide to Your Health

What is a physical exam?

A physical exam means different things to different people. We at Partners in Internal Medicine would like you to understand what a physical means to our physicians and patient care staff. This will help you when you need to schedule an appointment and will explain why and what tests we recommend.

A physical exam will be different for each patient because each patient has different health needs. Age, health status, past medical history, family history and current national health standards will help guide recommendations. A current and past history of your health problems may be requested along with examination of those areas that require attention. It is not required that every part of your body be examined each year, nor are blood tests, x-rays, urine tests, pap smears, shots or other types of tests mandatory each year. It is important to treat each patient individually according to up to date health care standards.

What tests should I expect to receive?

Most physicians use guidelines to help decide what test to recommend and how often examinations should be done for patients. We use the American Cancer Association, the American College of Physicians, and the American College of Cardiology guidelines.

Below are a list of tests that we currently recommend and the frequency in which they are required. Please remember that each patient is different and that these guidelines continue to change as our world changes. Medicine is challenging. We actively participate in conferences and in teaching to keep current in this changing medical environment.

- **Cholesterol screening:** every 5 years (may be done more often if levels are abnormal or indicated by history)
- **Colon cancer screening:** starting at age 50
 - * Yearly Fecal Occult test (stool cards looking for blood)
 - * Sigmoidoscopy (rectal exam with a scope to look for early cancers or polyps)
Recommended every 3 – 5 years if no bowel problems.

(Tests cont.)

- Women:
 - * **Cervical cancer screening:** Pap smears at least every 3 years ages 18 – 65 (earlier if sexually active). Women who have had abnormal pap smears in the past, who are on birth control pills or who have had many sexual partners should have these more often.
 - * **Breast cancer screening:** Mammograms yearly starting at age 50 (under 50 depends on the individual)
- Men:
 - * **Prostate cancer screening:** starting at age 50, yearly rectal exams
 - * **PSA yearly blood test** (controversial and should be discussed with your physician)

**In general, if one has an immediate family member with breast or colon cancer we start screening as above or 10 years before the age at which the cancer was first diagnosed, whichever is earlier.*

Stress tests, chest x-rays, urine tests, blood tests (other than those just discussed), and EKG's are not routinely recommended unless indicated by history or symptoms of the individual. Some of us obtain "baseline" EKG's at certain ages.

When do I need to come in for a physical exam?

Physical exams are recommended in general with no other health concerns every 2 – 3 years ages 18 – 49. (If you see an OB-GYN for a yearly pap you do not need a physical until age 50 unless you have specific concerns.) Physical exams are recommended yearly over age 50.

What shots should I get done?

- Tetanus shot: every 10 years
- Influenza vaccine (flu shot): yearly age 65 and over or earlier if you have certain chronic conditions (given in the fall)
- Pneumovax (pneumonia vaccine): every 10 years age 65 and over or if a chronic condition—note that this covers only a small amount of organisms that can cause pneumonia.

What else can I do to ensure good health and well being?

- Quit smoking
- Eat a healthy low fat/high fiber diet
- Exercise
- Seatbelt use/Bicycle helmet use