

## Health Screening for Men

Annual checkup guidelines, with a focus on flexibility.

By Dr. Rob for MSN Health & Fitness

Dr. Rob

Q: I'm a 40-year old man and I recently went in for an annual physical. Aside from some general questions about my lifestyle habits and any health complaints, I found the experience to be underwhelming. What types of test and screenings should be included in an annual physical for a person of my age?

A: While 40 years of age is relatively young, it is also an important time to review your current health status as well as to initiate measures to prepare for your next 40 years. This would include a discussion of your physical, emotional and sexual health, as well as a review of any known medical or behavioral patterns that have occurred in immediate family members or close relatives. Diagnostic and medical examinations would then be targeted to your current and future health needs. By working together, you and your physician would design a "health plan for life."

First up: A health inventory

First and foremost, how are you feeling? Your examination should include questions about your overall energy levels, sleeping patterns, ability to carry out the demands of daily living, if you're anxious or depressed, if you live alone or with others, and whether you are optimistic or pessimistic about life in general.

Next, your physician will ask about physical symptoms such as:

- \* Are you having any pain? If so, where is it located and when does it occur?
- \* Do you get short of breath, wheeze, have a persistent cough, or have difficulty taking a deep breath?
- \* Do you experience irregular or rapid heartbeats?
- \* Do you have any tingling or numbness?

- \* Have you had any unexplained weight loss or weight gain?
- \* Do you have any difficulty or change in urination or movement of your bowels?
- \* Have you had any new moles or changes in any you currently have?
- \* Do you have any restriction in movement of your head, neck, back or extremities?
- \* Have you experienced any change or difficulty in vision, hearing, taste, touch or smell?

### Your health, your choices

Your physician will ask about specific social behaviors or habits, which are sometimes difficult or awkward to discuss. For example, do you smoke tobacco, and if so, how many times per day, and how old were you when you started? This choice can (and does) increase your risks for certain diseases, including those of the heart, lungs, esophagus and mouth. If you drink alcohol, the amount and frequency can turn an occasional social enjoyment into a health risk. A discussion would also take place regarding the signs and symptoms of impairment, as well as a confidential dialogue concerning the use or overuse of prescription medications such as those used for pain or sleep, as well as any other type of substance abuse.

### Other issues to discuss include:

- \* Family history—Certain diseases that affected your parents, siblings and close relatives can also affect you. This may affect when you are screened for certain diseases, such as heart disease and colon cancer.

- \* Dietary choices—What you eat affects your current and future states of health. This is a great time for you to record everything you eat (even snacks) and drink over a two-week period. Then, meet with a registered dietitian (find one at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)) to devise a healthier (if needed) and tasty meal plan geared to your budget and taste buds.

- \* Physical activities—What types (walking, swimming, gardening, etc.), how often (daily, weekly, occasionally), and for how long.

- \* Sleep—How many hours per night (most adults need seven to eight), and is it restful or interrupted by frequent awakenings? This is important because a lack of sleep (from sleep apnea, insomnia, or just staying up too late doing other things) can

lead to health concerns such as depression, weight gain, high blood pressure, fatigue and accidents.

\* Sexual history—Are you in a monogamous relationship, how many partners have you had, do you always practice safe sex, what about your partner and his or her past sexual history? Have you or your partner ever had, or recently been tested for, a sexually transmitted illness? Additionally, your doctor will most likely ask questions related to the signs or symptoms of erectile dysfunction (ED). The sexual health inventory for men may be considered. If ED is a concern and a problem is identified (such as smoking, depression, cardiovascular disease, or diabetes), an action plan to help can begin.

### Screening for health

While there are general health screening guidelines for a man of age 40, it is important to know that this plan would be tailored to your specific medical and family history, current state of health, and anticipated health risks. That said, here are some general preventive strategies for your health "to do" list.

\* Immunizations—An adult tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) booster needs to be updated every 10 years. And, since you were born after 1957, it's important to discuss whether or not you would need the measles/mumps/rubella vaccine. Additionally, the hepatitis B vaccine may be on your health menu, especially if you have a higher risk for exposure to this virus. The yearly influenza vaccine is also a consideration.

\* Potential use of aspirin to decrease the risk for heart disease and stroke.

\* Blood pressure checked at least every two years if normal, more frequently if elevated.

\* Cholesterol, HDL, triglycerides and LDL screening at least once every five years, more frequently if abnormal and/or if taking cholesterol-lowering medications.

\* Diabetes screening—Fasting blood sugar test at least once every three years, more frequently if your results are abnormal.

\* Weight, height and body mass index calculation, in addition to a waist circumference measurement. These can be done at each routine visit.

\* Digital rectal examination on an annual basis to check the prostate.

\* Consideration of a testicular examination.

\* A full skin examination to check for signs of skin cancer.

In addition, your doctor would recommend twice-yearly dental visits. He or she may also recommend the following on an annual basis: urine tests (for microscopic signs of blood or protein); thyroid tests; dilated eye exam and testing for glaucoma, as well as a complete physical examination. Screening tests for HIV or other sexually transmitted illness would be based upon your sexual history and risk factors.

For further information, please speak with your physician as well as visit the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

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