A Well-Woman Visit is the annual check-up to review a woman’s overall health, including the key elements of ideal cardiovascular health. The American Heart Association has developed “Life’s Simple 7,” a seven-step guide that defines important ways to reduce risk for heart disease and stroke: manage blood pressure, control cholesterol, reduce blood sugar, get active, eat better, lose weight and stop smoking. The annual Well-Woman Visit is a great opportunity for women and their doctors to know if they are on track to achieving ideal cardiovascular health as a part of their full health story.

The Well-Woman Visit is now free under most health plans and Medicare, thanks to the health care law, yet less than half the population is aware that the Well-Woman Visit and other preventive services are now available without any out-of-pocket costs.

However, women should consult their plans for specific preventive services coverage language before scheduling a visit. For example, mentions of a specific condition or immediate health concern may trigger additional cost for the exam. The Well-Woman Visit can be scheduled with your primary care physician, nurse-practitioner or even your OB-GYN. It is a separate visit from other appointments for specific sicknesses or injuries.

**YOUR WELL-WOMAN VISIT GOALS**

Your Well-Woman Visit is a chance to focus on your overall health and wellness. There are 3 main goals for your visit:

1. Documenting your health habits and history
2. Having a clear health checklist to better understand what to expect in your Well-Woman Visit
3. Setting your health goals

**YOUR HEALTH HISTORY**

Before your physical exam, your health care provider will ask you to answer some questions about your overall health. These questions may cover topics including:

- Medical history
- Family’s health history
- Sexual health and sexual partners
- Eating habits and physical activity
- Use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Most recent relevant screening tests and vaccinations
- Mental health history, including depression
- Relationships and safety
- Current and past medications and supplements
YOUR WELL-WOMAN VISIT CHECKLIST

Here are the measurements, examination elements, tests and screenings that might be part of your Well-Woman Visit that will help assess your health risks. The actual exams and screening tests conducted by your health care provider will depend upon your age, family history, and dates of previous screening tests:

- ✔ Measuring your height and weight and then calculating your body mass index (BMI) to see if you are at a healthy weight
- ✔ Checking your blood pressure
- ✔ Taking your temperature
- ✔ Head and Neck Exam
- ✔ Abdominal Exam
- ✔ Dermatological Exam
- ✔ Doing a breast exam but not a mammogram: (feeling your breasts and under your arms for lumps or other changes)
- ✔ Pap test and HPV test for cervical cancer
- ✔ Laboratory tests: There are no standard laboratory tests during an annual physical. However, some providers might order certain tests including
  - Chemistry panel: From a heart-health perspective, the most important components are blood glucose and cholesterol levels.
  - Complete blood count
- ✔ Other:
  - Cardiovascular Risk Calculation using the AHA CV Risk Calculator
  - Assessing colorectal cancer screening status
- ✔ NOTE: EKGs are NOT recommended as a routine part of a Well Woman Visit.

INSIDE THE WELL-WOMAN VISIT: SIMPLE TIPS

When you call to schedule your appointment, know that not all healthcare providers use the term “well woman visit”. It can also be referred to as your yearly, annual or preventative health exam.

Every health care provider has a slightly different order and style when they review your medical history and do a physical exam; however, most examinations involve the same basic elements.

When calling to schedule the appointment, ask if fasting (for blood work) or any other preparation is necessary. It’s best to know your family history and your own health history.

Your health care provider might examine you from head to toe so be prepared to totally disrobe.

Your health care provider will want to know a bit about your habits, both good and bad. Be honest – the health care provider can only help if he or she knows the truth. Remember that anything you tell your health care provider is completely confidential.

HEALTHCARE BACKGROUND and coverage information

The Affordable Care Act that was signed into law in 2010 eliminates cost-sharing to help make the Well-Woman visit affordable for all.

In order to get your free annual Well-Woman Visit, you need to make sure your health care provider codes it correctly. Ask your provider and insurer ahead of your appointment how each service will be coded. This will help you know if a service will be billed as preventive care or not. Medicare and some state Medicaid programs also offer free annual wellness visits. It’s a good practice to check with your health care provider to ensure they participate in your health plan’s network and what is available to you at no cost.

03 SETTING YOUR HEALTH GOALS

Your health care provider will talk to you about the next steps for helping you stay healthy. Ask about tobacco cessation, if you smoke, and for additional counseling to address healthier eating, physical activity, and weight management. Together, you can decide which follow-up services or additional screenings are right for you.

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