

CottageHouseCall

Galesburg Cottage Hospital • 695 N. Kellogg St. • Galesburg, IL 61401 • 309-343-8131

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Health Screenings During the Golden Years

By: Carl Strauch, M.D.

By age 70, many Americans have completed their working lives and moved into the golden years of retirement. After decades of hard work and planning, those in later life should enjoy peace of mind rather than worry about their health. Maintaining a schedule of health screenings can contribute to a happy, healthy retirement.

Health screenings are as individual and unique as the person involved. Personal and family health history and other factors will influence the schedule of testing recommended by your physician. Whether caring for yourself or a loved one, it can be beneficial to understand the generally recommended screenings for people in this age group.

Certain tests should be done regularly regardless of gender. People over the age of 70, just like their children in their 40s, should regularly have their blood pressure checked and should have a dental, hearing and vision exam every year or two. The vision exam should include a check for glaucoma, a condition that can damage the optic nerve but has few noticeable symptoms. General blood screens can effectively detect many conditions, and your physician can determine how often a screen should be performed. Tests done on a person's stool and an internal procedure known as a colonoscopy can identify certain types of cancer, and anyone over the age of 45 should seriously consider being tested for type 2 diabetes. Physicians may also check for physical abilities such as walking and balancing to make sure a person can safely navigate everyday activities.

Some types of screening are gender-specific. By this age, men should be having a prostate exam regularly. These exams take only a few minutes and are helpful in detecting a number of conditions. Women should continue to have clinical breast exams, mammograms and pap tests every year or two until otherwise directed by their physician. They should also have a bone density scan, as bone health is highly important for women in their 70s.

Along with these tests, people in later life should remain current on their vaccinations. It is important for this age group to get a flu shot every year. Ninety percent of flu-related deaths are among people 65 and older. Pneumonia is another serious condition, accounting for thousands of deaths annually among the elderly. Experts estimate that fifty percent of pneumonia-related deaths could be prevented by proper vaccination. Most people need only one pneumonia shot, generally around age 65 and sometimes earlier. A physician can determine whether a person needs to be vaccinated for Measles, Mumps and Rubella, Hepatitis B or other conditions.

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Risk factors and previous conditions will influence the frequency of screening. For example, a male with chronic high blood pressure or a female with a family history of cancer might require more frequent tests for these conditions. On the other hand, people who been consistently healthy in areas such as cholesterol or blood pressure might require less frequent testing in these areas. Individuals who have used tobacco on a regular basis should be tested for an abdominal aortic aneurysm as well as being checked for oral cancers.

The golden years should be relaxing and enjoyable. While they will never be entirely free of health-related issues, appropriate and timely health exams can help ensure the highest quality of life possible. Contact your physician to determine an individualized schedule of health screening.

Additional information on other health topics is available through the hospital's Senior Circle Program. Senior Circle encourages a healthy and active lifestyle for adults age 50 or better by providing programs that encourage continued learning, wellness, free health screenings and volunteering, coupled with a host of social activities. For more information, please call the hospital's Senior Circle office at (309) 343-6565.

Test: Vision

Source: American Association of Ophthalmology
Frequency: Every two to four years

Test: Dental (teeth, gums, tongue)

Source: American Dental Association
Frequency: Annual

Test: Hearing

Source: Centers for Disease Control
Frequency: Every one to two years

Test: Cholesterol

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Lipid test every five years

Test: Blood pressure

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Every two years

Test: Type 2 Diabetes

Source: American Diabetes Association
Frequency: Every three years; possibly more often depending on certain risk factors

Test: Vaccinations

Source: Centers for Disease Control
Frequency: Pneumonia shot around age 65; annual flu shot; tetanus booster every ten years

Test: Cervical cancer (women only)

Source: American Cancer Society
Frequency: Annual PAP test

Test: Breast Cancer (women only)

Source: American Cancer Society
Frequency: Regular self exams; Annual clinical breast exam and mammogram

Test: Osteoporosis (women only)

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Bone density scan around age 65

Test: Prostate (men only)

Source: Mayo Clinic
Frequency: Annual

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We hope this issue of CottageHouseCall has been helpful to you. Please call again.