

Milestone Medical Tests in your 50s

You're in your 50s. It's the prime of your life -- or it should be. Don't let illness rob you of your health.

When you go for your annual physical, make sure your doctor performs or recommends these simple tests that may save your health -- and your life -- later. (Note that your doctor may recommend additional tests based on your personal health profile.)

- **For Women Only: Thyroid Hormone Test.** Your thyroid, that innocuous looking gland in your neck, is the body's powerhouse, producing hormones needed for metabolism. Aging (and an erratic immune system) can wreak havoc causing a variety of problems, especially in women. That's why women should get a thyroid test at age 50 and then every five years.
- **The Rectal Exam.** Dread it, hate it, joke with your friends about it. Just make sure you get one -- every year. Along with other tests your doctor may recommend, it may give clues to treatable problems in your colon (think colon cancer) or prostate for men.
- **For Men Only: PSA-Prostate Exam.** Short for prostate specific antigen, this blood test when combined with a rectal exam can effectively detect prostate cancer in most men. Most experts recommend getting both tests every year starting at age 50, but some men may need to start getting PSA testing at age 40. Discuss this with your doctor.
- **Stepping on the Scales.** This is the age when most people start gaining weight. Watch this weight gain carefully, and fight back with healthier eating and exercise. Being overweight puts you at high risk for developing a number of diseases -- and studies show that weight loss can improve your odds.
- **Blood Pressure.** Untreated high blood pressure is an equal opportunity killer -- it kills your heart, your brain, your eyes and your kidneys. Don't let hypertension sneak up on you. Get the test. It's simple, it's cheap and it's quick.
- **Cholesterol Profile.** Do you have high cholesterol? Find out -- at least once every five years (more if you're at risk for a heart attack). Controlling your cholesterol can add years to your life.
- **Blood Sugar.** Untreated diabetes can destroy your health, causing heart disease, kidney failure, and blindness. Don't let it. Get a fasting blood sugar test at least once every three years and take control of diabetes early.
- **For Women Only: Pelvic Exam and Pap.** You may think you have suffered enough -- at least 20 years of pelvic exams and Paps! But you still need these -- especially if you're sexually active. Ten minutes of mild discomfort once every one to three years pays big dividends in protecting you from cancer and sexually transmitted diseases.

- **For Women Only: Breast Exam and Mammogram.** At this age, don't ever let a year go by without getting a mammogram and having your doctor examine your breasts for any changes. Early detection of breast cancer can save your breast and your life.
- **Looking for Moles.** Love your skin. Check your skin monthly for any unusual spots or moles. Be sure to ask your doctor to check your skin once a year, as well.
- **Protecting Your Eyes.** Vision-robbing diseases become more common as you age. Be sure to get your eyes examined regularly -- every one to two years. (Go more often if you have vision problems).
- **Checking Your Immunizations.** People over age 50 should get a flu shot every year. And don't forget, even healthy people need a tetanus booster shot every 10 years. Be sure to ask your doctor to update any immunizations that you might need.

Use your birthday as a gentle reminder to schedule a visit to your dentist, and call your doctor to see if there are important tests you should take. By investing an hour or two now, you may be able to add years to your life.

Courtesy: <http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/guide/milestone-medical-tests-50>