



## Important Medical Milestones

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Doctors are often asked how to evaluate one's health status and how to prevent illness. This question in itself is simple but the answers can be more complex. With all the information and technology available, it is no wonder why patients can get so overwhelmed with all the recommendations.

There are recommendations for good habits and good lifestyle, recommendations to prevent cancer-related illnesses and recommendations to prevent certain infections, as well as certain metabolic diseases, such as high cholesterol and diabetes mellitus, to name a few. Most of these are based on the general population, but your doctor can make specific recommendations based on your individual needs.

Good habits and good lifestyle choices will probably go as far as anything medicine can offer. This probably is the single most important thing you can do overall in preventing illnesses.

Along with this comes a number of recommendations that can be helpful in preventing certain specific illnesses. This is based on what the medical society calls a screening test, which is for people who have no additional risk factors or are considered at average risk or low risk.

Some cancers can be predicted and prevented. Colorectal cancer, among the leading causes of all cancers, is one such example. It is widespread to recommend a colorectal cancer screening done by a gastrointestinal specialist who performs a colonoscopy. A colonoscopy is usually recommended after the age of 50. If the results are found to be normal, the GI doctor recommends a repeat procedure every five or 10 years.

Breast cancer screening has long been scrutinized. There has been some controversy over what age is the best time to start screening. The current recommendation is to begin testing after the age of 50 by screening mammograms; however, it has

been widespread practice to test at the age of 40.

Pap smears for cervical cancer screening have significantly reduced the tragic effects of this disease. Pap smears typically are recommended based on your age. Until the age of 30, women should receive annual tests; after 30, the tests can be performed every one or three years, depending on the woman's risk profile.

Testing for diabetes mellitus has been recommended to be an annual test. This can be done a number of ways, most commonly a fasting blood glucose or an oral glucose tolerance test. Cholesterol testing has been recommended to be done between every one to five years, depending on your risk profile.

Vaccinations are determined based on your age. Your doctor can tell you whether you need tetanus, influenza, the H1N1 or a pneumococcal, among others.

Finally, a good general physical examination has been found to be helpful and influential in determining your present and future health status. Since no two people are identical, the recommendations a doctor may prescribe varies with each individual. The patient-physician relationship is critical and tantamount to healthy outcomes.

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