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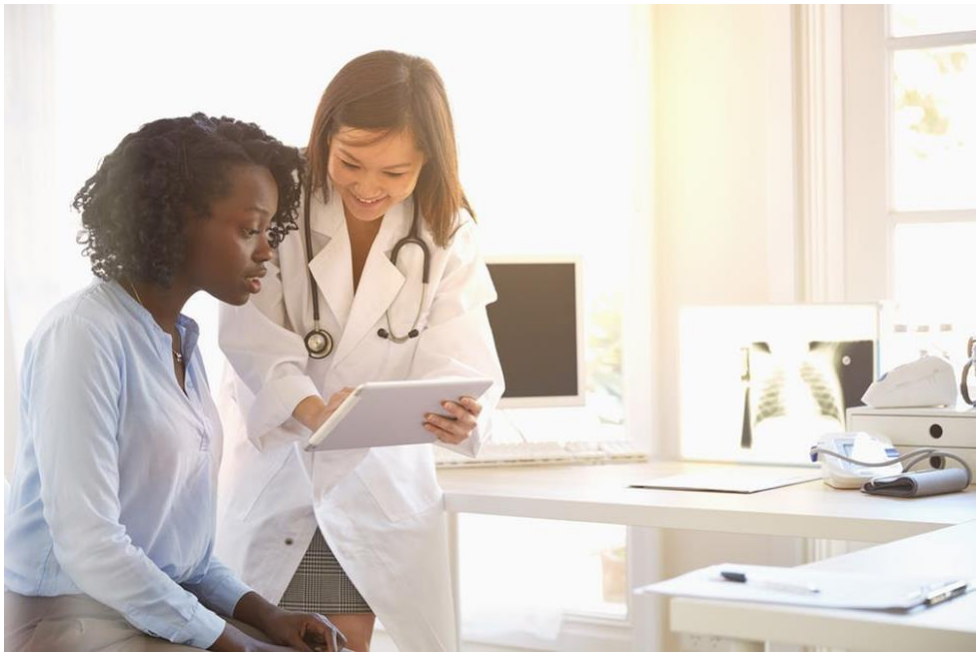
5 Key Health Exams You Should Schedule Each Year

Wondering why millennials skip out on important health exams? The internet may be partially to blame, with answers a quick Google search away. Niket Sonpal, an internist and gastroenterologist, says, “Millennials want fast affordable solutions and often take a DIY approach to health. They’d rather text or FaceTime with a doctor, or visit urgent care to pay $40 to be done with it, fast.”

A November 2018 survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation shows that 45 percent of people aged 18-29 don’t have a primary care physician, while more than a quarter of people between 30-39 go without one as well. This is especially problematic because, as Sonpal points out, sneaky problems like stress might go unnoticed for a long time. “This approach may be okay for treating a sore throat or flu, but it could mean a missed opportunity to nip a bigger problem early on,” he says.



Don't beat yourself up if important exams have slipped off your radar; it's better to get back into the healthy habit of scheduling regular checkups now than to put them off for longer. You can even use your birthday as a reminder each year. "With this approach, you'll easily remember when you last saw a doctor for your exams," Sonpal offers.

5 HEALTH EXAMS TO GET ON YOUR CALENDAR THIS YEAR

1. Schedule an eye exam — even if you don't think you need it. Spending tons of time in front of a screen might be a job requirement or your favorite way to relax. Either way, the strain that heavy screen time puts on your eyes is real. "Millennials were raised on technology, and their eyes are reaping the cost of this: Spending up to 12 hours a day, even on mobile devices held close to the eye, can lead to 'near-sightedness' or 'short-sightedness' — making it hard to see things that are further away," Sonpal notes. Instead of popping a pill to get rid of a pesky headache (a common symptom), book a visit with an optometrist. Eye strain can also cause you neck aches or force you to squint to see things better.

2. Have your blood pressure checked. As a rule of thumb, you should have your blood pressure checked at least once every two years. High blood pressure can indicate conditions like diabetes, which Sonpal says has hit the millennial generation especially hard following a massive increase in obesity rates in the United States. "Teen obesity rates rose 30 percent from 2001 to 2015, according to the CDC," he notes. "As kids, millennials were part of a supersize culture… this can cause diabetes and heart disease if not monitored." A healthy blood pressure looks like more than 90 over 60 (90/60) and less than 120 over 80 (120/80); a top number over 140 or a bottom number above 90 is an indicator of hypertension, or high blood pressure, and should be discussed with your doctor.

3. Ask for a digestive screening. You might follow your gut, but have you had it literally checked out lately? The foods you eat may have hormones or antibiotics and can cause you stomach trouble. "The millennial generation grew up with a diet that was full of processed foods; we see a lot of gluten intolerance," Sonpal shares. Need another reason to skip self-treating your tummy? He tells us that research by the Journal of the National Cancer Institute shows colon cancer is also a surprising risk for people in their 20s,

having risen 2.4 percent per year from the mid-1980s to 2013. “If you’re experiencing chronic stomach pain, see a doctor,” he urges. “Gut health is incredibly important for your overall well-being.”

4. Consider a check-up for just your mental health — even if you feel great. Today’s world moves quickly, and the constant info flow that comes with digital devices and apps can be overwhelming. Sonpal has observed some unhealthy trends. “Millennials are a stressed-out generation; according to *Psychology Today*, suicide rates among young adults have tripled since the 50s. In a 2017 report on stress, the APA noted that 63 percent of millennials say they’re attached to their phone or tablet, and young people report feeling disconnected.”

Along with his overview, Sonpal reports a silver lining that’s good for everyone to remember: “The good news is that millennials are willing to discuss their feelings, and studies show that this is the first generation who doesn’t see any stigma about seeing a therapist.” So while it might make the most sense to consider a checkup for your mental health when you realize you’re feeling down, seeing a therapist about ongoing issues or healthy conflicts is a preventive measure that can help you stay healthy.

5. Whatever you do, don’t skip your annual exam. A quick reminder: getting a flu shot each year is a good guideline, as well as ensuring you’ve been vaccinated for HPV if you haven’t already. “Your annual physical is a chance to go over your health history and prevent sickness, as well as certain types of cancer,” Sonpal points out. “I urge all young women to keep up with wellness exams, which count a Pap smear and breast exams, along with STD screening and regular blood work.”

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