

Wellness Check-Ups and Preventative Care

It is important to have an annual physical or wellness check-up each year so any underlying health problems can be found early and treated. The Primary Care Physician (PCP) or regular doctor normally conducts this annual check-up. It is important for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to see their PCP for this annual wellness check-up when they are feeling good, so their provider can examine them and get to know what they are like when they are healthy.

Preventive healthcare involves strategies to prevent illness or diagnose and treat early. Preventive healthcare includes immunizations and screening tests for heart disease, diabetes and other health problems that are best caught early. Many of the preventive services start at the annual check-up with the PCP.



People with IDD and/or physical disabilities should receive the same preventive health care as the rest of the community. Sometimes the screenings and test are challenging, depending on the complexity of the disability. These services may require extra planning and advocacy. Families and support workers should work with the primary care provider (PCP) to ensure that people with disabilities are getting appropriate preventive health care.

Supporting the Annual Wellness Check-Up

- Support the person in making the appointment.
- If this is a new provider, be sure to ask if the person's insurance being used is accepted.
- Be sure to provide the reason for the appointment and ask about a copay.
- Let the doctor's office know in advance of any accommodation the person might need. Use the "My Profile" card to help with this.
- If the person chooses, they may bring a parent or support person along with them to the appointment.
- Take any personal health records, a list of current medications, a written list of questions (if any) and any other information that might be helpful to the provider.
- Support the person in talking with the doctor about the activities of the visit and any instructions or follow-up that are needed.

At the Appointment

Typically, the doctor will check general health, medications, height, weight, and gather information on diet, and exercise habits. They will check blood pressure and other vital signs, heart and lung function, and their general appearance. They may want to draw blood and order one or more routine laboratory tests. This helps them diagnose, treat, and make health recommendations and referrals.



They will also examine the person's head and neck, as well as their extremities for any abnormalities. They will ask questions about the person's lifestyle behaviors and family and personal health history. The annual wellness check-up is also an important time to talk about any health concerns. The person can ask any questions they may have about their health and what the doctor is doing. Make sure the person asks the PCP if a follow-up appointment is necessary in case, they need to talk about any test results or other recommendations that may have been made. The provider may use this time to give more advice about treatment, monitoring, and/or prevention. They may also use this time to refer the patient to another health care professional or specialist.

Preventative Care



Common preventive care includes immunization shots or vaccines. An annual flu shot is an important preventive measure, especially to help protect people with underlying health conditions. It is an option for everyone. Another important vaccine to consider is the pneumococcal vaccine, which can help prevent some types of pneumonia and meningitis. PCP's can encourage screening for bowel/colon cancer or specific medical conditions that may result in colon cancer. This is recommended for all people over 50 and earlier for those with a family history of bowel or colon cancer.

Hearing and vision should be assessed every 3 to 5 years, and a dental check-up every 6 months

For Women

All women need regular breast examinations, and women over 50 should have mammograms every 2 years, unless their doctor recommends a mammogram at an earlier age or with greater frequency, possibly due to family history. Women who are now or used to be sexually active should have a Pap smear every 3 to 5 years.

Some women need to have regular bone density scans. The person and their medical team will discuss recommendations.

Families and support workers often need to help a woman understand these procedures and provide support as needed.



For Men

Some conditions are more common in males with I/DD. Some boys have hormone deficiencies that impede puberty. The genitals may grow more slowly, hair may not grow on the face, and muscles may not develop. This condition is treatable. Some boys' testicles do not descend, so the doctor should check genitals every year. They should also check for signs of testicular cancer throughout adulthood.

For men over 50, talk to the doctor about whether to do regular prostate screenings. Many men with I/DD will need support from family or support workers when they have a prostate screening or an examination of their genitals.

Supporting the Person After Their Check-Up

It is important for the person to follow their provider's recommendations. These recommendations may involve follow-up actions including scheduling diagnostic tests, such as blood, urine, or other tests, and making appointments with specialists. Recommendations may be made regarding a personal health plan or goals the person wants to pursue with the help of their doctor. Parents, family members, or service providers can support the person in following the provider's recommendations based on the person's needs.

Acknowledgement

The Iowa Taking Charge of My Health (TCMH) curriculum, including power points, worksheets and fact sheets is inspired by Oregon's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Taking Charge of my Healthcare Toolkit which can be found at <https://www.ohsu.edu/oregon-office-on-disability-and-health/taking-charge-my-health-care>.

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The information provided is for general use and not medical advice or intended to address any individual situation.