

Mercy Clinics, Inc.

Preventive Health Care *Recommendations for you if you are age 65 or older*

What you do can really affect your health. All five of the major causes of death—cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung disease and injury—can be caused or prevented by the things you do. Inside this guidebook you'll find recommendations from the physicians and staff of the Mercy Clinics to help you maintain your health.

Specific portions of this booklet are recommendations made by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, American Cancer Society, American Academy of Family Practice, American College of Cardiology, American Academy of Ophthalmology, and the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologist.

This booklet is divided into three main sections: Screening Tests, Treatment to Prevent Disease, and Counseling. Refer to these areas as your health guidebook.

Screening Tests

These tests are recommended for people with no signs or symptoms of disease. Health screenings are done to detect problems early or prevent problems from occurring. If you have known diseases or symptoms, you may need additional tests based on your medical history.

Many insurance companies, especially Medicare, will not pay for “routine screening tests” even though they are recommended. Testing done to follow-up known diseases or symptoms is usually covered by Medicare. We will inform you about what we think your insurance will pay for, but cannot guarantee what your insurance will cover.

This booklet is intended to provide you with general guidelines and information regarding your health and health screening. General information of the type provided here is intended for informational purposes only. It is not a substitute for medical advice provided by a treating health care practitioner who can adequately evaluate your individual needs and circumstances.

Treatments to Prevent Disease

Some immunizations should be given to everyone older than age 65. This section will guide you regarding disease prevention and treatments.

Counseling

This section contains recommendations you can follow to prevent illness or accidents. It covers diet and exercise, injury prevention, substance use and sexual behavior.

Complete medical history and physical examination

This examination is useful to evaluate for symptoms of disease in all body systems, assess all health risks and make certain that all needed screening tests are done. The complete physical examination also is useful to be sure that proper follow-up is being done for all your known chronic health conditions. **Medicare does not pay** for routine physical exams.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have a complete physical exam every one to two years if you are age 65 or older.

Blood profiles

These blood tests can detect abnormalities of the internal organs.

Medicare does not pay for these tests when used for routine screening.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have a blood profile with each complete exam. This profile should include blood sugar, cholesterol, kidney tests, liver tests and a complete blood count.

Urinalysis

This is useful to detect infection, kidney disease and diabetes. *Medicare does not pay* for screening urinalysis.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have a urinalysis at the time you have your complete physical exam.

Occult blood test

This test checks your bowel movements for small amounts of blood that might suggest colon cancer. *Medicare pays* for this test once a year.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have this test done every year.

Pap test

This test can detect and prevent cancer of the cervix (the opening of the womb). *Medicare will pay* for screening Pap smears every three years.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Women who have had three previous normal tests, should only have a Pap test every three years (or more often at the discretion of your physician). Most women who have had a hysterectomy do not need to have a Pap test.

Sexual diseases

Diseases that can be passed by sexual contact include AIDS, herpes, chlamydia, syphilis, hepatitis and gonorrhea. Those at highest risk of spreading diseases are persons who inject drugs or persons with multiple sexual partners. The safest sex is between two people who are only having sex with each other and who don't have a sexually transmitted disease.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Avoid sexual contact with high-risk individuals or abstain from sex. If you feel you are at risk for getting a sexually transmitted disease you should discuss this with your doctor and be tested.

Tobacco

Tobacco use causes heart disease, lung disease and cancer of the lung, mouth, esophagus, pancreas, kidney, bladder and cervix. Tobacco is an addictive drug. If you don't smoke, don't start. The use of nicotine gum and patches can help. There are many stop smoking programs in the community.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

If you smoke you should make immediate plans to stop. If you have tried to quit smoking and failed, you should try again.

One program is sponsored by Mercy Hospital Medical Center, the Iowa Heart Center and the American Lung Association. To register, call the Mercy Nurse 24 hours a day at 2-HEALTH (243-2584).

Alcohol

Moderate use of alcohol (up to two drinks per day) has not been linked to any health problems. Excessive alcohol use can cause liver disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, brain shrinkage, nerve damage, ulcers, malnutrition and increased falls and accidents.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

If you use alcohol you should limit it to two drinks per day. You should never use alcohol while driving, swimming, boating or engaging in any other potentially dangerous activities.

PSA (prostate specific antigen)

This test is very controversial. It can detect prostate cancer in an early state. No one has ever demonstrated that early treatment of prostate cancer improves the outcome of the disease. (This may be because the treatments have not been studied enough at this time.) The treatment of prostate cancer will cause impotence in 60 percent of men, the inability to control urine in 30 percent and death in one percent. **Medicare will begin paying** for screening PSA testing on January 1, 2000.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Mercy Clinics feels the decision whether or not to do this test should be made after discussing the pros and cons with each patient. The American Cancer Society recommends that this test be done yearly on all men over 50. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force feels this test should not be done for routine screening.

Thyroid test

This is a blood test that evaluates the thyroid gland, which controls metabolism. An underactive thyroid can cause you to be tired, feel cold, have dry skin, have increased cholesterol or become constipated. An overactive thyroid can cause you to have sweating, irregular heartbeats, weight loss, nervousness, or tremors. **Medicare will only pay** for this test if you have the above (or similar) symptoms.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

This test should be done at the discretion of your physician.

Smoke detector

If your home does not have a smoke detector, you are two to three times more likely to die during a home fire than someone who has detectors in the home.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

All homes should have correctly installed smoke detectors. Check the batteries at least twice each year to make certain the smoke detector is working properly.

Hot water heater temperature

Hot tap water burns account for 2,600 hospitalizations each year.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Set the temperature of your hot water heater to 120-130 degrees or lower.

CPR training

Do you know how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)? CPR courses will help you learn how your heart and circulatory system work. This information also is helpful in learning how to avoid a heart attack.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should learn this life-saving technique, especially if you are caring for elderly persons or children or are around a home that has a swimming pool. Learning techniques to assist persons who are choking (Heimlich maneuver) also can reduce the risk of death from choking.

Fall prevention

Each year about 12,000 Americans, primarily older persons, die as a result of falls. Regular exercise builds strength and balance and can help prevent falls. Medications such as narcotic pain relievers and tranquilizers have been associated with an increased risk of falls.

Firearms

Firearms caused 1,740 accidental deaths in 1993 and cause as many as 30,000 non-fatal accidental injuries each year. Firearms being kept for protection (i.e. shooting an intruder) are 10 times more likely to cause unintentional injury. Many of the injuries are to children.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Be careful around known hazards such as stairs, slippery surfaces (such as loose rugs and ice), poor lighting, unexpected objects and poor footwear. Use canes and walkers if you need them.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Unload firearms and store them in a locked compartment or remove them from the home.

Sigmoidoscopy

This is a screening test for colon cancer. It involves using a flexible scope to examine the lower colon for polyps or tumors that may indicate cancer or pre-cancer.

Colon cancer will develop in eight percent of all people. If detected early, it is curable. **Medicare will pay** for screening Sigmoidoscopy every four years.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

If you are older than age 50, you should have a sigmoidoscopy at least every three to five years as recommended by the American Cancer Society and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

Mammogram

This is an x-ray for detecting breast cancer. Breast cancer will develop in 12 percent of all women. If breast cancer is detected early, it is curable. **Medicare will pay** for screening mammograms once yearly.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Women should have a mammogram each year after age 50.

EKG

This test traces the electrical activity of your heart and is useful to detect heart disease.

Medicare will not cover this test unless you have symptoms of heart disease such as chest pain.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

All patients older than age 65 should have a baseline EKG. It should be repeated periodically at the discretion of your physician. It should especially be considered in patients who have three or more risk factors for heart disease (age over 50, high blood pressure, diabetes, positive family history, smoker or high cholesterol).

Seat belts

Using seat belts has been shown to reduce the risk of serious injury and death by greater than 50 percent. Unrestrained children are 10 times more likely to die in a motor vehicle crash than are restrained children. Beginning with all 1998 model vehicles, both driver-side and passenger-side airbags are required. A review by the National Traffic Safety Administration estimates that air bags increase the effectiveness of lap-shoulder belts by about 5 - 10 percent.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

All people in automobiles should use safety restraints. You should use seat belts and shoulder harnesses. Children should be in the back seat and those children age 4 and younger should be secured in child safety seats.

Motorcycle and bicycle helmets

Persons who wear helmets when riding motorcycles or bicycles have more than a 50 percent lower chance of sustaining a head injury than persons who do not wear helmets. Research also shows that helmets reduce the rate of death by more than 25 percent.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

If you ride a motorcycle or bicycle, you should wear a helmet.

Vitamins

There is no evidence that vitamin supplementation benefits people who eat a balanced diet. Certain vitamins may have a protective function, but they have not been studied enough to prove this.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Look for things that may prevent you from eating right (i.e. chewing problems, medications, busy schedules, etc.). The Mercy Nutrition Specialists may be reached at 247-4336 to help you develop a more balanced diet.

Exercise

Regular physical activity has been proven to reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Engage in moderate physical activity each day. These activities include walking, cycling, swimming, raking leaves, mowing the lawn or racket sports. Walking for 30 minutes a day is a good way to exercise. You should consult your treating health care practitioner before implementing an exercise plan.

Osteoporosis testing

Osteoporosis is a loss of bone that will affect one of every three women after menopause. It causes major disability and increases a woman's risk for hip and spine fractures. Osteoporosis can be detected by simple x-ray tests. There are now effective treatments available to prevent or reverse osteoporosis. **Medicare will pay** for this test for at least one of the following conditions: 1) women not taking estrogen after menopause; 2) individuals who have abnormal spines; 3) individuals who have hyperparathyroidism; or 4) individuals on steroid therapy.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Most women after menopause should be tested for osteoporosis if they are not taking estrogen replacement therapy.

Vision testing

Up to 25 percent of elderly people have inappropriate visual correction. Poor vision is associated with an increase risk of falling and automobile accidents.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

If you are age 65 or older, you should have your vision checked yearly using a Snellen Visual Acuity chart.

Hearing testing

Discuss your hearing situation with your doctor. People who receive hearing aids have improvement in communication, social function and emotional status.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

If you have hearing problems you should have an ear exam and possibly a formal hearing testing.

Dietary sodium

Sodium is found in salt. It can cause high blood pressure and fluid retention. Sodium intake should be limited to less than 3 grams per day. Hidden sources of salt are in pickles, soups, canned food, processed meats (hot dogs, bacon, etc.) and softened water.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Your use of table salt should not exceed a half teaspoon each day.

Dietary calcium

Calcium helps make stronger bones and prevent osteoporosis. The major source of dietary calcium is in dairy products.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Patients who don't consume dairy products should take calcium carbonate 1500 mg. per day. Taking five Tums tablets would provide this, but generic calcium carbonate would be less expensive.

Dietary fat

Reduced intake of dietary fat will reduce the risk of heart disease, obesity and possibly cancer. Fat has a calorie content of nine calories per gram while starches (carbohydrates) and protein have four calories per gram. Reducing your fat intake will reduce your calorie intake and help you lose weight. You should be aware of the fat content of foods you eat.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

The Mercy Clinics agree with the U.S. Government guidelines and advises that no more than 30 percent of calories should come from fat. That would be 60-80 grams per day for most people.

Dietary fiber

Increasing the amount of dietary fiber in your diet will improve your bowel function and may lower your blood sugar, weight and cholesterol. High fiber foods are low in fat.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should eat more grains, fruits and vegetables to increase your fiber intake.

Tetanus diphtheria (Td)

Tetanus (lockjaw) and diphtheria (a serious throat infection) are diseases you don't usually see any more because of preventive shots that can be given. Tetanus shots are ***not covered by Medicare.***

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have the Td shot every 10 years to prevent tetanus and diphtheria.

Influenza vaccine

Influenza is a virus infection that occurs in December through March each year causing cough, fever and muscle pain. Influenza can lead to pneumonia and death. Flu shots are ***covered by Medicare.***

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have the flu shot every year if you are age 65 or older. This protects against Influenza A and B.

Pneumococcal vaccine

This vaccination protects you against one cause of pneumonia—the Pneumococcus bacteria. Pneumococcus causes about 15 percent of the cases of pneumonia in the United States. Pneumonia shots are ***covered by Medicare.***

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

You should have this vaccine at least once if you are age 65 or older. (High risk patients may need a booster at the discretion of their physician.)

Aspirin

Aspirin can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. It can cause ulcers, intestinal bleeding and cerebral hemorrhage.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Most persons who are older than age 40 should take one Aspirin tablet (325 mg.) daily if they have risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Because of the risk of stomach trouble or bleeding problems, consult your physician before starting Aspirin.

Hormones

Estrogen hormone replacement therapy has been shown to reduce the risk of osteoporosis, fractures and heart disease. Estrogens can relieve hot flashes, reduce bladder infections and leakage, reduce vaginal irritation, improve sexual function and reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. Estrogen therapy can cause cancer of the uterus, but this is eliminated by giving progesterones (another female hormone) with the estrogen. Estrogen probably causes a small increased risk of breast cancer (about one percent increased risk), but the exact relationship of estrogen to breast cancer is uncertain. The most common side effects of estrogen therapy are breast tenderness and irregular vaginal bleeding or resumption of menstrual periods.

Mercy Clinics recommends . . .

Estrogen hormone replacement therapy should be considered for all women who are past menopause unless there is a specific reason not to take hormones.