



HEALTH AWARENESS

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CANCER CHECKS: EARLY DETECTION AND PREVENTION

Cancer checks, also known as cancer screenings, are essential preventive measures that play a critical role in the early detection and management of various types of cancer. These screenings are medical tests or procedures performed on individuals who may not show symptoms of cancer but are at risk due to factors such as age, family history, or lifestyle. The primary goal of cancer checks is to identify cancer early when it is most treatable, thereby improving the chances of successful treatment and survival.

IMPORTANCE OF CANCER CHECKS

Cancer remains one of the leading causes of death worldwide, with millions of new cases diagnosed each year. Early detection is crucial because cancer, when caught in its initial stages, is often easier to treat, and the likelihood of a cure is significantly higher. Regular screenings can detect cancers before symptoms arise, allowing for timely intervention.

In 2024, the American Cancer Society projects that 2 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed, and over 600,000 people will lose their lives to the disease in the United States. The good news is that cancer mortality has been steadily declining, with more than 4 million deaths prevented since 1991. This progress is thanks to reduced smoking rates, earlier cancer detection, and advances in treatment options. By prioritizing cancer checks, we can work towards a future with fewer cancer deaths and a higher quality of life for all.

TYPES OF CANCER CHECKS

Several types of cancer checks are commonly recommended, each targeting specific cancers. The following are some of the most widely used screenings:

SKIN CANCER

- **Skin Examination:** Regular skin exams, whether self-exams or by a healthcare provider, are essential for detecting skin cancer, including melanoma. Individuals are encouraged to monitor their skin for new or changing moles, spots, or lesions and seek medical advice if anything suspicious is found.

BREAST CANCER

- **Mammogram:** This breast X-ray is recommended for women, typically starting at age 40 or 50, depending on individual risk factors. Regular mammograms can detect tumors that are too small to be felt and can reduce the risk of dying from breast cancer.



COLORECTAL CANCER

- **Colonoscopy:** This exam uses a flexible tube with a camera to inspect the colon and rectum. It is recommended for men and women starting at age 45. Colonoscopies can detect and remove polyps before they become cancerous.
- **Fecal Occult Blood Test:** The non-invasive test checks for hidden blood in the stool, which can be a sign of colorectal cancer. It is often used as an initial screening test and, if positive, is followed by a colonoscopy.

PROSTATE CANCER

- **Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) Test:** The blood test measures PSA levels, which can be elevated in men with prostate cancer. Although commonly used, the PSA test has limitations and is typically recommended based on individual risk factors, including age and family history.

BARRIERS TO CANCER CHECKS

Despite the proven benefits of cancer screenings, several barriers can prevent people from undergoing these critical checks. These barriers include:

Lack of Awareness

Many individuals are unaware of the recommended cancer screenings for their age group or risk factors. Public health campaigns and education are vital to increase awareness and encourage participation in regular screenings.

Access to Healthcare

Limited access to healthcare services, particularly in rural or underserved areas, can prevent individuals from receiving timely cancer screenings. Addressing healthcare disparities is crucial to ensuring all populations can access preventive care.

CERVICAL CANCER

- **Pap Test:** This test collects cells from the cervix to check for precancerous or cancerous changes. It is recommended for women starting at age 21.
- **HPV Test:** The test targets high-risk human papillomavirus strains in the cervix that could lead to cervical cancer. It is often done in conjunction with a Pap test.

LUNG CANCER

- **Low-Dose Computed Tomography:** This imaging test is recommended for individuals at high risk of lung cancer, such as heavy smokers or those with a long history of smoking. It is effective in detecting lung cancer early, particularly in high-risk groups.

Fear and Anxiety

Fear of the procedure, potential results, or a cancer diagnosis can deter individuals from undergoing screenings. Education, support, and counseling can help alleviate these fears and encourage participation.

Cost

The cost of cancer screenings can be a significant barrier, especially for those without insurance or with high-deductible plans. Efforts to make screenings more affordable and accessible are essential to increase participation rates.

BENEFITS CORNER

Take steps toward a healthier future by prioritizing preventive care. As a member of CHP, your health plan covers many preventive screenings, wellness exams, and vaccinations designed to catch potential health issues early and keep you and your family healthy.

Since coverage of preventive services varies by health plan, you can find out what services and screenings your Anthem plan covers by:

- Visit anthem.com
- Call the Member Services number on the back of your health plan ID card.
- Check your member handbook.

RECOMMENDED ADULT VACCINE SCHEDULE

Vaccine	19-59 years	60-64 years	65+ years
Hepatitis B	✓		
Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis	✓ Every 10 years		
Influenza (flu)	✓ Get an annual flu vaccine, ideally by the end of October		
COVID-19	✓ Speak to your doctor about frequency and dosage		
Pneumococcal polysaccharide			✓
Measles, mumps, rubella		✓ 1-2 doses depending on risk factors	
Meningococcal			✓
Varicella (chickenpox)	✓ 2-dose series		✓
Zoster (shingles)	✓ 2-dose series for ages 50+; 2-6 months apart		