

Well-Woman Visits: What You Need to Know

What is a well-woman visit?

A well-woman visit is a yearly health checkup for women, teens, and girls. Your well-woman visit is a chance to focus on your overall health and wellness, including your reproductive health and mental well-being, at every stage of life.

These appointments are usually with an obstetrician or gynecologist (OB/GYN), midwife, nurse practitioner, or another health care professional who has special training in providing care for women.

What happens during a well-woman visit?

Well-woman visits focus on preventive care. Your well-woman visit will take place in a private examination room, with only you, your doctor, and possibly your doctor's assistant. You will change into a medical gown for the examination.

The exam **may** include any of these screenings or conversations, based on your age and risk factors:

- Medical and family history
- A physical exam (height, weight, blood pressure)
- Vaccines (like HPV, Tdap, or flu, depending on your age and risk factors)
- Breast exam
- Pelvic exam
- Pap smear (Pap test)
- Education and counseling to help you make healthy choices

Do not schedule a well-woman visit when you are on your period (menstruating). Avoid douching, sexual intercourse, or vaginal creams for 48 hours before your appointment.

At what age and how often do I need a well-woman visit?

[The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) (ACOG) recommends well-woman visits every year for any girl, woman or teen recorded as female at birth who is 18 years and older or as soon as they become sexually active.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) and [Texas Health & Human Services](#) (HHSC) recommend a targeted well-woman exam to include a pelvic exam and lab work for STIs for females as early as age 11 if sexually active, but no Pap test until age 21. Teens younger than 18 who are not sexually active can schedule their first visit between ages 13-15 and every year after.

AAP & ACOG Pap Smear Recommendations:

- Before age 21 - No Pap test
- 21-29 years - Pap test every 3 years
- 30-65 years - Pap test every 3 years, or co-test every 5 years with HPV test, or HPV test every 5 years



What happens during the breast exam, pelvic exam, Pap test, and HPV test?

Breast Exam:

- During a breast exam, the provider will do a visual exam to look for anything unusual or any changes in the shape, size, or color of the breast.
- They will feel your breast with their fingers, underarm area where lymph nodes are located, and collarbone (near the neck) to check for any lumps (hard spots) or swelling.

Pelvic Exam:

- You will lie on the exam table and place your legs in stirrups.
- The provider will do an external visual exam for any issues, including sores, irritation, or swelling.
- Then they will insert a small plastic or metal tool, a speculum, inside the vagina to help the provider to see inside and access the area better.
- The provider will check your reproductive organs by inserting a finger inside the vagina and pressing from the inside and outside the pelvic area to check your reproductive organs.
- A pelvic exam may or may not include a Pap test.

Pap Test (Pap Smear):

- If you need a Pap test, then during the pelvic exam, your provider will use a large cotton swab (like a Q-tip) and a small brush to collect a cell sample from your cervix.
- It is a quick process. Your provider will send the sample to a lab to check for abnormalities, including signs of cervical cancer or pre-cancer.
- It's important to try and relax as much as possible during the exam, for your own comfort.
- It may be uncomfortable, but should not be painful. If you experience pain, tell your provider immediately, so they can stop the procedure.

HPV Test:

- HPV tests check for the Human Papillomavirus.
- HPV tests are often done at the same time as a Pap test.
- Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer.

What other screenings or care will I get?

Here are other common health screenings and preventive care you may get at your well-woman-visit depending on your age, risk factors, and family history. You may not get every screening or service at every visit.

- **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) Screening:** An STI test checks for sexually transmitted infections, like chlamydia, which often has no symptoms. It is quick and painless.
- **Vaccines:** Your doctor may recommend vaccines like the HPV vaccine for cancer prevention (especially for teens and younger women), Flu (annually), and Shingles (for women 50+)
- **Counseling:** During your visit, your doctor may talk to you about your lifestyle (substance use, diet, and exercise), sexual health (birth control, STI prevention), mental well-being, and perimenopause/ menopause. These discussions all depend on your age and needs.
- **Urine sample and blood tests:** These routine tests can check for things like liver dysfunction, diabetes, anemia (low iron), and vitamin D levels.
- **Bone Density Test (DEXA):** A DEXA scan measures your bone strength and can be used to diagnose osteoporosis.

What questions should I ask during my well-woman visit?

Your well-woman visit is a great chance to ask about any health issues you are experiencing. Don't be afraid to be open and honest with your doctor. Here are a few sample questions they can help answer.

1. I want to start birth control. What options are right for me?
2. My period is heavy and painful. What can I do to get relief?
3. I don't feel like myself. Am I starting perimenopause or menopause?
4. I'm depressed and anxious. Where can I get help?
5. Am I due for a Pap test?
6. Do I need the HPV vaccine?
7. How can I protect myself from sexually transmitted infections?
8. Cervical cancer runs in my family. What can I do to prevent getting it?

MORE INFORMATION

✓ Schedule Your Well-Woman Visit

Call your primary care provider or your OB/GYN to make an appointment to get tested. Need help? Call **210-358-6055** or email healthyhelp@cfhp.com. Or find an in-network doctor by logging into the Community First Member Portal or using our online Provider Directory at CommunityFirstHealthPlans.com.

✓ Transportation

Community First offers STAR, STAR Kids, STAR+PLUS, and Medicare Advantage Alamo Plan and D-SNP Members [non-emergency medical transportation](#) to and from well-woman visits and other medical appointments at no cost. Learn how to [book a ride](#) before your next appointment.

✓ Rewards

Community First STAR Members who are participating in our [Healthy Living: Lifestyle Management Program](#) will receive a \$25 gift card for getting a cervical cancer screening, and a \$25 gift card for getting a chlamydia screening. Limitations and restrictions apply. [Learn more about this reward](#) and other Value-Added Services you may be eligible for as a Member.

✓ Other Health Services for Women

Visit our [Women's Health page](#) to learn more about the benefits and services Community First covers for the unique health care needs of women at every stage of life.