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A Medical-Screening Checklist for Older Adults

By Glenn Ruffenach

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My question is about health. Have you written about preventive tests for older adults? How can I evaluate various screenings? Is there a good list out there?

A good topic to start the New Year. Figuring out just what illnesses you should be poked and prodded for, and when, is one of the most important ways you can take care of yourself. Unfortunately, many of us probably know more about the tests and shots our pets need than the ones we need. Example: Men and women who are at average risk for colon cancer should first be screened at age 45, according to the American Cancer Society. But only 58% of Americans age 50 to 64 have been tested.

And don't assume that your doctor will keep track of these tests for you. Few health-insurance plans, including Medicare, adequately reimburse physicians for the time they spend counseling patients about such preventive measures. Plus, by the time you're in your late 50s or early 60s, you're probably seeing a handful of specialists who are paying more attention to specific conditions than to your overall health.

Start with the gold standard, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org), a panel of medical experts who evaluate screenings and publish guidelines for consumers. [Here, you will find a tool](#) that can help pinpoint screenings for "seniors."

Equally valuable—and a bit quicker—is an article (and checklist) about preventive services in Better Health While Aging, a website published by Leslie Kernisan, a specialist in geriatrics. Dr. Kernisan has gone to the trouble of sifting through the Preventive Services Task Force recommendations for older adults *as well as* Medicare's coverage of preventive services. (In a word: smart.) She also does a

nice job of explaining how preventive services work, including “why they can sometimes be harmful, or sometimes fall out of favor.”

Go to betterhealthwhileaging.net and search for: 26 recommended preventive health services. Don't let that figure scare you. As Dr. Kernisan notes, most tests don't need to be addressed every year, and some may not apply to you at all.