

A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO  
**Primary Care**



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

LIVING WELL  
STAYING WELL  
Women's Health at Mass General

# *Every woman*

wants to stay healthy. Every day you hear new information about diet, hormones, exercise, ways to prevent cancer and more. This can be confusing. The good news is that you are not alone. Your Massachusetts General Hospital primary care team will help you understand your health needs and will listen to your concerns. Together, you will create a healthcare plan that is right for you.

Read this brochure to find out how to take advantage of some of the best healthcare in the world, located near where you live and work.

## **Learn about:**

- *Your primary care team,*
- *When to make an appointment,*
- *How to get ready to meet with your team,*
- *Guidelines for health tests and exams you may need.*

## About Your Primary Care Team

*Your primary care team will work with you. They will care for you and help you take care of yourself.*

Your **Primary Care Physician** (PCP) is the doctor you will call whenever you have a health problem or concern. He or she will also see you for routine physical and gynecological exams. If needed, your PCP will refer you to a specialist. Your PCP directs your care at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Some PCPs work with a **Nurse Practitioner**. A Nurse Practitioner is a licensed, registered nurse with specialized training and an advanced degree. Like your PCP, the Nurse Practitioner can assess and diagnose medical problems, prescribe medicine, develop treatment plans and provide one-on-one patient education. Your Nurse Practitioner works with your PCP to make sure all your healthcare needs are met and that you are as healthy as possible.

*Your  
**Primary Care  
Physician**  
or  
**Nurse  
Practitioner**  
can perform  
your routine  
gynecological  
and clinical  
breast exams.*

## When to call for an appointment?

**For routine physical exams.** You should see a member of your primary care team for your routine physical exam every one to two years. This is a time to talk to your doctor



about your concerns and about healthy lifestyle choices. This visit is important to prevent health problems by screening for diseases.

**For follow-up and urgent care.**

Call any time you have questions or concerns about your health.

You should call for an appointment whenever you have a new symptom or change that needs urgent attention. You do not have to wait until your next routine physical exam to have your questions answered by a member of your primary care team.

For example, a woman may want an appointment to ask about menopause, contraception, or help in managing a chronic disease like diabetes or high blood pressure. Or a woman may need an urgent appointment for a new problem.

**For emergencies.** In a life-threatening emergency, dial 911.

*It is also important to know how you can ask for medical advice when your primary care team's office is closed. Ask for the phone number to call when the office is closed.*

## Four things to prepare for your appointment

*Take these steps to prepare for your visit to make your appointment more productive.*

**Bring a list of questions.** Write down any concerns or questions you have. If you have a problem, write down your symptoms, when they started and anything that makes them better or worse. Share your list with your primary care team.

**Bring a list of all medicines you are taking.** Include prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins and health supplements. Check to see if you need any prescription refills so you can ask for them at your appointment.

**Think about your lifestyle and your health.** Be prepared to talk to your primary care team about how your lifestyle may affect your health. This may include smoking, stress, exercise, nutrition and relationship concerns. If you are concerned about your safety at home or with your partner, you can share this information with your team. All information is kept in strictest confidence. Your primary care team is prepared to help address these concerns.



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**Be an active member of your primary care team.** Look at the guidelines in this brochure to know when you may need routine screenings. Talk to your team about the screening tests and timeline that is right for you. Keep a record of the dates of all your screening tests (Pap Test, mammograms and any tests you have). Tell your team about vaccinations you have had and about any allergies you have.

*By taking an active role in your care you can stay healthy.*



MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL  
*Among the Best*

Your primary care team is part of the best. *U.S. News and World Report, Annual Guide to America's Best Hospitals* ranks Massachusetts General Hospital as "...an institution to seek when the highest and best standards of diagnosis and treatment are needed."

*Massachusetts General Hospital outstanding primary care and prevention services are widely respected. All of the primary care physicians are highly trained members of the hospital staff and serve on the faculty of Harvard Medical School.*

**A Woman's Guide to Primary Care**  
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# Suggested Screening Guidelines *for Women\**

◀ **The chart inside this panel recommends exams, screening procedures and check-ups for women of adult age. Use this information as a guide based on your age and overall health. Your Primary Care Physician or Nurse Practitioner will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the listed procedures.**

*\*Individual risks and insurance coverage may vary. Ask your doctor about what is appropriate for you.*

LIVING WELL



STAYING WELL

Women's Health at Mass General

# Suggested Screening Guidelines *for Women*\*

	Ages 18 – 34	Ages 35 – 49	Ages 50 – 64	Ages 65+
<b>PHYSICAL</b>	<b>General Physical</b>	Every 1 to 2 years	Every year after age 40	Every year
	<b>Blood Pressure Check</b>	As part of your routine physical exam, blood pressure will be checked for all age groups.		
	<b>Weight Management</b>	Ask your doctor to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI) during your routine physical exam.		
<b>CANCER TESTS</b>	<b>Cholesterol</b>	Every 1 to 5 years depending on your first results	Every 1 to 5 years depending on your test results	Every 1 to 5 years depending on your test results
	<b>Blood Sugar for Diabetes</b>	Ask about your risk	Ask about your risk	Every 1 to 3 years
<b>CANCER SCREENINGS</b>	<b>Pelvic Exam</b>	May be part of physical exam every 1 to 2 years; If sexually active, screen for sexually transmitted diseases (STD)	May be part of physical exam every year after age 40	May be part of physical exam every year
	<b>Pap Test for Cervical Cancer</b>	Every 1 to 2 years from age 21 <i>OR</i> within 3 years of becoming sexually active	Every 1 to 3 years, based on the type of test used and on your risk factors	Every 1 to 3 years, based on the type of test used and on your risk factors
	<b>Colon Cancer</b>	Ask about your risk	Ask about your risk	Stool test for hidden blood every year or Sigmoidoscopy every 5 years or Colonoscopy every 10 years.
	<b>Clinical Breast Exam</b>	May be part of the Physical Exam	As part of Physical Exam	As part of Physical Exam
	<b>Mammogram for Breast Cancer</b>	Ask about your risk	Every year, starting at age 40	Every Year
	<b>Visual Check for Skin Cancer</b>	Check for changes of moles or lesions	Check for changes of moles or lesions	Check for changes of moles or lesions
	<b>Bone Density Test</b>	Ask about your risk	Ask about your risk	Discuss your risk and prevention strategies every year
<b>OTHER</b>	<b>Glaucoma Test</b>	Not usually needed	Every 3 years after age 40, if considered high risk for glaucoma	Every 3 years
	<b>Hearing Test</b>	Not usually needed	Not usually needed	Review with health provider on a yearly basis
	<b>Mental Health Screening</b>	Ask about your risk	Ask about your risk	Ask about your risk
	<b>Bone Density Test</b>	First test at 65, if not previously done. Discuss risks and prevention strategies every year		
<b>VACCINES</b>	<b>Flu Vaccine</b>	Every year, if high risk	Every year, if high risk	Every year
	<b>Pneumonia Vaccine</b>	Not usually needed	Usually not required, unless risk factors present	Usually not required, unless risk factors present
	<b>Tetanus</b>	Once, then booster every 10 years	Booster every 10 years	Booster every 10 years

*\*Individual risks and insurance coverage may vary. Ask your doctor about what is appropriate for you.*