The Importance of Regular Medical Check-Ups

Regular medical check-ups are a key factor in maintaining overall health. While a healthy lifestyle consisting of a nutritious diet and regular exercise is important for preserving optimal health, regular examinations and screenings provide the added benefit of catching medical conditions early on. These early detections will enable your doctor to implement prompt and effective treatment.

One Plan Does Not Fit All
When it comes to how often you should pursue a medical check-up, the answer varies and depends on the individual patient. Age, gender, and general health status are all determining factors.

A healthy young man in his twenties with an uneventful medical history may only need to undergo regular check-ups on an annual basis. A geriatric patient will require more frequent doctor visits.

In addition to visiting your primary care physician, you may require regular examinations with additional doctors. For example, women should visit a gynecologist regularly for a cancer screening and to address specific female health concerns.

A patient who is afflicted with a health disorder that requires steady monitoring, such as hypertension or diabetes, will be required to visit a physician more often in order to maintain control of the condition.

The Spotlight Is Yours
Routine physical exams are the easiest segment of the medical check-up. You are in the spotlight as the doctor performs his or her examination. The stage is yours, so use this opportunity to voice any problems, questions, or concerns. Any details regarding your health will provide your physician with additional information that could prove valuable toward diagnosis. Use a tablet or an old-fashioned pen and paper to make these points readily available during your visit. Nervous patients will often forget to mention something pertinent.

During the physical examination, your doctor will evaluate your weight and assess your skin. He or she will listen to your heart and lungs and check your blood pressure. Some physicians additionally check reflexes, palpate your abdomen, and look at your eyes, ears, and mouth. All of these checks and balances will detect any superficial abnormalities.

Expect a conversation and exchange of information to take place. Your doctor will likely review your family's medical history, making note of any genetic conditions. You will be asked questions regarding lifestyle habits, such as smoking, drinking, exercise and diet. You may also be asked if you have experienced any new symptoms, such as frequent headaches, aching joints, changes in bowel habits, fatigue, chest pain, shortness of breath or indigestion. The doctor will also notate all supplements and medications, including those purchased over the counter that you have been taking.

This will provide an opportunity to make your doctor aware if you have experienced any allergic reactions that should be noted in your chart for future reference. Finally, any recommended vaccinations will be administered. Based upon age, occupation or risk factor, such vaccines may include tetanus, influenza, pneumonia, or hepatitis B.

Your Body's Innermost Secrets Revealed
Once your physician has completed his or her physical evaluation, additional tests may be recommended. While the physical examination has provided a view of your health from the outside, laboratory diagnostics provide a view of what is going on inside, and will complete the picture of your health. Screening recommendations are based on several factors, including age, gender, risk factors, and any unusual findings on the physical examination.

The most common routine screening panel includes a complete blood count and blood chemistry profile. The blood cell count will show ratios of red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and other hematologic components. These results will detect the presence of infection, anemia, or a blood disorder. The chemistry profile will evaluate the function of such internal organs as the kidneys, liver, and pancreas. Cholesterol ratios and glucose levels will also be revealed. By undergoing these simple and basic blood tests regularly, your doctor will be able to catch any subtle changes early on, which will allow easier treatment before the condition spirals out of control.

A chest X-ray and EKG may be recommended for older patients as an added method for ruling out the presence of heart disease. Mammograms will be recommended for women in order to achieve early detection of breast cancer.

Specialized blood screenings may be recommended in cases where presenting complaints, risk exposure, or physical exam findings warrant them. For example, for those living in heavily wooded areas and complaining of joint pain, a Lyme disease titer may be recommended. Diabetic patients will be required to have an AIC test to show their trending average glucose levels, men will have PSA screening performed to evaluate prostate health, and some patients will need to undergo a T4 to evaluate thyroid function.

More Doctors, More Tests, More Power
Once the physical examination and initial screenings are complete, your doctor will put together all of the information. If any of the findings merit further investigation, he or she may refer you to a specialist. Patients who have been diagnosed with a health condition need to be especially diligent with doctor visits. The need for a specialist indicates that there may be a problem.

The specialist may ultimately rule out the problem altogether. If the condition is confirmed, however, the specialist will become a key player in devising the most effective treatment plan to help you control and maintain your health. Whether the individual is a diagnosed lupus patient who must visit a rheumatologist or a diabetic patient required to see an endocrinologist, podiatrist and ophthalmologist, it will be imperative to undergo regular check-ups with all recommended specialists.

Conditions that may not require a specialist, such as hypothyroidism or hypertension, will require more frequent exams or blood testing in order to verify that the prescribed dosage of medication used is keeping the condition under control. Stay organized by scheduling the next recommended appointment before leaving the office.

Staying on top of regular medical check-ups and your doctor's recommendations will empower you to preserve optimal health and maintain a satisfying and active life.

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