



The Importance of Health Screenings in Women's Health

By Vanessa Mensah

What is a Health Screening?

A **health screening** is a medical test performed on adults or children who appear healthy and have no symptoms of underlying conditions. The goal of a health screening is to detect disease early, when conditions are easier to treat.

Health screenings are considered a form of **preventive care**. Preventive care focuses on early detection because most diseases are more manageable when identified at an earlier stage. It includes routine checkups, screenings, and vaccinations. Most insurance companies are required to **fully cover** the recommended preventive health screenings at no cost to you, meaning no copayments or deductibles.

Recommended Health Screenings by Age

20's and 30's

- ❖ **Well woman exam:**
Annually
- ❖ **Cervical Cancer**
Screening: **Pap smears**
every 3 years from 21-29
- ❖ **STI Screenings:** All STI's
plus HIV
- ❖ **Skin Cancer:** Regular self
exams and checks

40's and 50's

- ❖ **Mammograms:**
Recommended annual
exams or at least every 2
years
- ❖ **Colorectal Cancer:**
Colonoscopy's starting at
age 45
- ❖ **Diabetes:** Every 3 years
starting at age 35 if at risk.
- ❖ **Cholesterol:** Tests every 5
years starting at 45

60 and Above

- ❖ **Bone Density Test (DEXA):** Screens for
osteoporosis
starting at age 65
or earlier if at risk
- ❖ **Continued**
screenings
(mammograms,
diabetes, colon
cancer etc.)



Effectiveness of Regular Screenings

Health screenings are **highly effective** at detecting diseases early, reducing mortality rates for certain cancers and cardiovascular conditions by 30–60 percent. Screening for common cancers and chronic illnesses allows these conditions to be identified when they are most treatable.

In addition, screening for glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol is just as important, since diseases related to these factors often have no early symptoms. Routine screenings also give us the opportunity to make timely lifestyle changes that support long-term health.

Various Influential Factors



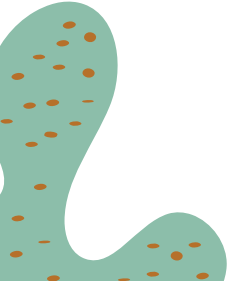
There are many factors that shape how we think about, receive, and access different healthcare screenings. Let's discuss a few.

Family History

Family history can guide which screenings you may need.

Medical Stigma

How culture and medical stigma can shape our experiences.



Lifestyle and Environmental Factors


Our lifestyle and the environment we live in can increase our health risks.

Demographic

The communities and neighborhoods we are part of can affect our access to care.

Access and Affordability

How insurance can influence how often we receive health screenings.



Family History

A woman's family history plays a major role in the diseases and illnesses that may develop throughout her life. Our family health history is a record of conditions commonly found within our ancestry, and because we share genes with our relatives, certain inherited traits can make us more or less susceptible to specific medical conditions.


For example, a person with a family history of diabetes is **2 to 6 times more likely** to develop Type II diabetes than someone without that history. This increased risk can influence how early and how frequently diabetes screenings should occur.



Demographic

Demographic factors such as **age, race, sex, and socioeconomic status** play a critical role in preventive care. Your demographic background helps physicians personalize which screenings are most appropriate for you based on your age, racial or ethnic background, and sex.

For example, sickle cell disease is more **prevalent** in people of African descent, so a doctor may recommend screening based on that demographic risk..



Lifestyle and Environmental Factors

Our **lifestyle** plays an important role in determining which health screenings we may need.

Lung cancer screenings, for example, might be recommended if you smoke, live in an area with high air pollution, or are frequently exposed to secondhand smoke.

Diabetes screenings may also be necessary if you have a diet high in sugar or other risk-enhancing habits.



Medical Stigma

Within certain cultures and communities, there can be a deep sense of **medical mistrust**. Some people may feel that their doctors are not accurately diagnosing them, or they may not feel heard or cared for during their medical visits.

This concern is very real and stems from a long history of **systemic discrimination** and medical malpractice that has fractured trust between marginalized communities and the healthcare system.

As women and as people of color, it is **essential** that we feel seen, heard, and protected within healthcare spaces.





Access and Affordability



A frequent concern surrounding health screenings is the **cost** and how much insurance will cover. In the United States, most insurance companies are required to fully cover recommended preventive screenings with an in-network provider, meaning there are no out-of-pocket expenses such as copayments or deductibles.

However, the allowed frequency of these screenings **varies** by insurance plan. Some companies cover annual screenings, while others only cover them every two years.

It's also important to understand the difference between a **preventive** screening and a **diagnostic** screening.



Preventative vs Diagnostic

Preventative

Preventative screenings are for patients with no symptoms

Diagnostic

Diagnostic screenings are used to investigate specific symptoms in order to confirm or rule out a specific condition

A strong patient-provider relationship is essential, because once you report a symptom, any tests ordered become diagnostic, and that's when costs and insurance coverage rules begin to apply.





Research

Doing your own research on your family history, lifestyle habits, insurance coverage, and in-network physicians is essential. Understanding these factors helps you make informed decisions and get the most out of your healthcare.



Key Takeaways

In conclusion, **women's health screenings** are not just appointments, these appointments are shaped by the realities of a woman's life. Family history, access and affordability, medical stigma, lifestyle and environment, and demographic factors all influence whether someone gets screened and how early issues are detected. Prioritizing screenings means addressing these barriers so every woman can benefit from early detection, prevention, and long-term health.



**Thank
You!**