

## Health screenings: take charge of your health

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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The age-old saying, “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” emphasizes that practicing healthy lifestyle behaviors like eating fruits and vegetables is important to your overall health. But do you really want to keep the doctor away? Keeping the doctor away can mean missing the signs of a disease.

Julia Bartlett, DC, the associate dean of chiropractic education at Northwestern Health Sciences University in Bloomington, Minn., says it is important to consult a licensed health care practitioner about receiving the appropriate health screenings necessary to disease prevention.

“Some people believe they are completely healthy because they have no symptoms,” says Dr. Bartlett. “This is why preventive health tests are so important; they are not just for the sick, they are for everybody. These screenings may catch the early signs of disease so the necessary treatments and lifestyle modifications can take place to improve one’s overall health.”

Age, health, family history, lifestyle, how much exercise you get, whether you smoke and other important factors impact what and how often certain screenings are needed. Dr. Bartlett stresses the importance of scheduling an appointment with a health care practitioner to discuss what preventive health services you need and when you need them.

“One of my goals is to make sure patients feel empowered about their health,” Dr. Bartlett says. “This includes being a smart health care consumer and well educated about the health screenings that are available, so that you can make informed decisions.”

Dr. Bartlett offers these guidelines about health screenings:

—Go to a health care provider you know and trust. If you don’t have a regular health care provider, ask people you know who they would recommend. “You have to trust your practitioner and feel safe sharing your personal and family health background. You can go to your primary health care practitioner, such as a family physician, gynecologist or chiropractor, to discuss the appropriate screenings,” Dr. Bartlett adds.

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—With your doctor to determine what tests are needed. “Finding the answers and making sense out of the best procedures necessary for one’s health takes time and commitment and often relies on strong, open communication between the patient and doctor,” Dr. Bartlett says.

—Ask the right questions. “Part of being a smart health care consumer means knowing what questions to ask your practitioner before you agree to have a health screening and don’t be afraid to ask them,” says Dr. Bartlett. Ask about the accuracy of the tests, the risk factors, the benefits, why you need them, the cost, the amount of time it takes and what the next steps are if the test is positive or negative.

—Find out what tests are recommended. “Becoming an informed, educated health care consumer involves knowing what screenings there are and what the general recommendations are for having these check-ups,” says Dr. Bartlett. General screenings for both men and women include those for cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes, and for cancers such as prostate, breast, skin and colorectal. Patients should discuss their optimal screening schedule with their health care provider.