

The
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Newsline

Exam Anxiety

IF YOU'RE in your late-20s or early-30s and working, chances are someone—a parent, a spouse, a friend—is nagging you about your health. Bad working hours, eating out, curtailed sleep, coupled with the urban Indian's normally lackadaisical attitude towards health, provide the ideal breeding ground for lifestyle diseases—and the perfect excuse to schedule that annual check-up now!

Why are physical exams important?

A comprehensive physical exam allows a doctor to obtain baseline info about a patient for future use. A physical exam is also an opportunity for an Q&A session to clear any doubts and pick up good health practices.

What are the tests that are necessary?

Apart from checking-the-pulse basics, "a complete health assessment includes recording a person's medical history and lifestyle, lab tests and screenings for disease,"

You can't get away from this annual exam. Toufiq Rashid finds out why you need to see the doc at least once a year

says **Dr Anupam Sibal**, medical director, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, New Delhi.

Doctors suggest the physical be part of the annual routine right from year 1.

■ **1-18 age group:** At this stage, the annual examination should focus on physical factors like weight, height. "In the pre-adolescent stage, the doctor will check if puberty is progressing properly," says Dr Sibal.

■ **19-29:** Physically, this is the prime of life. Metabolism is at its peak, and the body is naturally geared towards fighting off disease. If there is no serious illness, the doctor has no reason to come

calling—as long as you are eating and drinking right and not abusing the body.

■ **30-39:** An annual examination is compulsory after 30, especially if you live in a metro. The doctor will observe the patient's general health and behaviour, measure height and weight and record vital signs.

The doctor will study the skin (for lesions), hair, face, ear, eyes and nose. Women should go for pap smear tests and breast examinations while men need prostate checks.

Some vital tests for the liver, kidney and heart

CHECK PREP

- Jot down important facts in your medical history and those of family members
- Make a list of medication you are on
- Write down any specific concerns
- Clarify beforehand with the doctor if you need to abstain from food or water prior to the test
- Wear loose clothing

are important in this decade.

Smokers must go in for chest X-rays and CT-scans every year.

■ **40-plus:** Doctors recommend specific health checks at this stage. These include rectal examinations (screens for haemorrhoids, colon and prostate cancers), haemocult (screens the stool for blood that indicate polyps or colon cancer), PSA blood test (detects abnormally high levels of prostate-specific antigen in the blood), chest X-rays and CT scans.

■ **50-plus:** In addition to the above, blood and urinalysis tests are also recommended once every two years for the 40-49 age group, and every year after the age of 50. They help read cholesterol levels, diabetes risks, homocysteine levels for heart disease, kidney functions and other organ functions. Sigmoidoscopy (a test for colorectal cancer) is compulsory for high-risk men over 40 and every 3-4 years for people over 50.

In addition, these tests are best done annually.

ECG: It's a must to check if the heart is receiving its ade-

quate supply of oxygen.

Ortho, eye checks: Must for anyone facing creaking bones or weakening eyesight, especially if either runs in the family.

Pulmonary function tests: To nip any respiratory illness in the bud.

Cardiac and cancer tests: For women after menopause.

Gynaec tests: A must every year.

TB skin test: For those living in polluted cities.

What about the cost?

Most tests are included in the executive health check-up packages offered by major hospitals in the country. Specific tests may cost extra, but packages are mostly priced under Rs 5,000.

There are some tests you can do at home...

Men can self-examine themselves for abnormal lumps in the testicles, skin and mouth. Women need to examine their breasts for lumps, in addition to the skin and mouth.

your health