Module 3

When I Should Visit My Doctor

In this module, you can find information about:

1. Check-ups
2. Preventative care
3. What to do when you are sick or have pain
4. What did I learn?

1. Check-ups

Health check-ups are for everyone. There are many different kinds of check-ups and they are all important to get, even when you are feeling OK. You should check with your doctor to understand which checkups are best for you.

There may be special check-ups for you based on your health needs. Special check-ups may take longer than regular health checks. Ask your doctor what special check-ups you need.
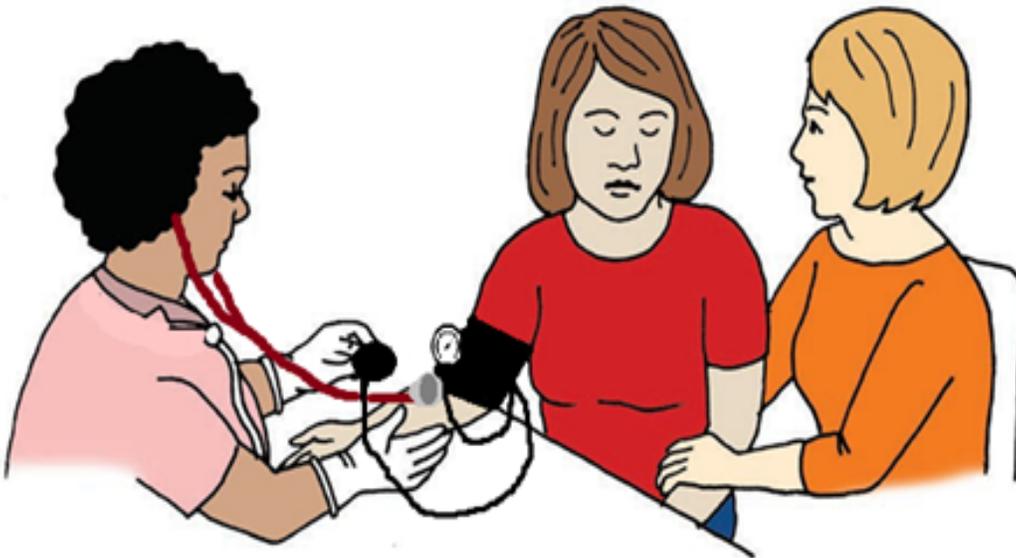
Sue is going to get a check-up.

Sue is not sick, but her doctor wants her to come in for a visit.

Her doctor wants to make sure she is healthy.

Sue gets nervous going to the doctor.

She asks her support person to come with her.

Sue's support person helps Sue remember what she wants to ask the doctor.

Annual Check-up:

A once a year check-up helps you to watch your health and gives you an opportunity to ask your doctor questions. A check-up is also a step in preventing future health problems.

Part of your annual check-up can be talking to your doctor about your sexual health.
If you are having sex or are intimate with someone or plan to be, tell your doctor. You should talk to your doctor about preventing sexually transmitted infections or an unwanted pregnancy. This could include getting a prescription for birth control, learning about condoms, or learning other ways to be prepared.
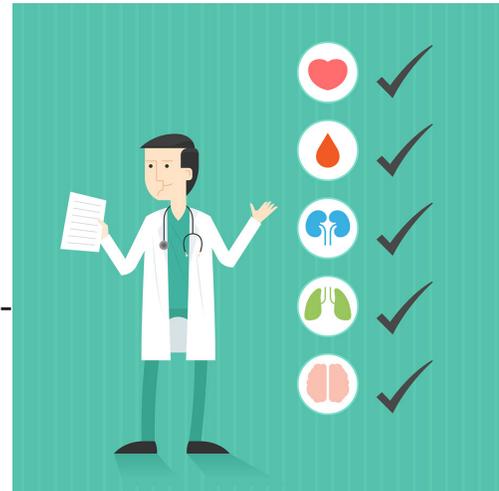
Dental Visit:

Have your teeth cleaned and checked for cavities and gum disease in order to prevent problems in the future. This visit should happen every six months or one time a year. Ask the doctor what they recommend for you.

Routine Eye Exam:

Eye exams involve a series of tests to check your vision and to check for any potential eye issues. You should have an eye exam every 1-2 years. Ask your doctor what they recommend for you.

Specialist Visits:

Depending on your specific needs, you may be referred to a specialist. A specialist is a doctor who focuses on one area of health care. Some types of specialists include:
- An audiologist (hearing)
- A cardiologist (heart)
- An optometrist or ophthalmologist (eyes/vision)
- A neurologist (nervous system)
- Rhuematologist (arthritis and other diseases of the joints, muscles, and bones)

2. Preventative Care

Preventative care is the care you receive to prevent illnesses or diseases. It includes screenings and immunizations to help you stay healthy.

Screening Tests:

Screening tests are used to detect diseases or other problems before any symptoms are noticed. This way, you can get the problem taken care of more quickly. It is important to get recommended screenings for your age, gender, and/or family history. The following are some types of screening tests:

- **Diabetes:** A blood test to check your glucose (sugar) levels. This screening test provides an early warning sign of high blood sugar levels. This can indicate that you are at risk for diabetes.

- **Heart Health:** A test of your blood pressure and/or cholesterol. A blood pressure test is important to see if you are at risk for a heart attack, stroke, and/or heart failure. Testing for cholesterol can help to find problems and treatments. This can help see if you are at risk of heart disease.

- **Sexual and Reproductive Health:** If you are sexually active or want to be, it is important for you and your partner to be tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) before beginning sexual activity. This prevents STIs from spreading and allows for any necessary treatment(s). A few ways to help detect cancer early are by getting a pap smear and pelvic exam or a testicular exam to identify any changes that may be of concern. All genders are at risk of contracting human papilloma virus (HPV). A test can determine if you have HPV. Having HPV can put you at risk for some types of cancer.

- **Breast Health:** A breast exam is important to identify cancer early. Self-breast examinations as well as examinations by your medical professional are both important. A mammogram and

an ultrasound are other ways used to detect breast cancer. Talk with your medical professional to find out the type of exam you should have. Tests may vary based on your age, family history, and medical needs.

- **Prostate Health:** Depending on your age and/or risk factors, you may need to get a prostate exam, which helps detect warning signs of prostate cancer.

- **Mental Health:** Mental health screenings are one of the quickest and easiest ways to determine if you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition. If you are feeling sad, anxious, or angry for over two weeks, speak to your doctor about it. The doctor will help you find ways to feel better.

Immunizations:

Immunizations help protect you against a variety of contagious viruses and diseases. Certain immunizations are recommended for your age and at different times throughout your life.

There are too many types of immunizations to list them all, but some common examples include:

- Influenza (flu)
- Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR)
- Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP)
- Chicken pox
- Pneumonia
- Polio
- Others…

Check with your doctor to see which immunizations are recommended for you.

3. What to Do When You Are Sick or Have Pain

If you are not feeling well or are experiencing pain or discomfort, DON'T WAIT to see your doctor! Your doctor can help you feel better.

See Module 6: Signs of Sickness to learn about the signs and symptoms of different illnesses.

4. What Did I Learn?

I can take charge of my health care when I:

- Know what check-ups I need
- Am able to receive preventative care
- Know what screenings I need
- Have immunizations to protect me
- Know who to call and what to do when I am sick or in pain

Notes:

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This module was adapted from NSW Council for Intellectual Disabilities (2009), Australia.

OSAC
Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition

OHSU

OCDD
Oregon Council on
Developmental Disabilities