

## **How Important is a Yearly Physical Exam?**

Recently there has been considerable discussion over how important having yearly physical exams are for your health. Many feel they are out dated and unnecessary, while many others feel a yearly exam is very necessary. I often hear “if it’s not broke I don’t fix it”! There are so many things that can go wrong with our bodies and while it is impossible to look into the future and know what will happen, there are clues that can tell us what probably will happen. Often a physician can discover these clues and take some type of action to prevent or lessen the seriousness of the illness. This is why a thorough history and physical examination is so important to your health. Often the earlier we find a problem the better the chance to prevent or cure the illness. We are good about getting well child exams for our kids because we know how important they are for them. However, we somehow loose this feeling of importance, as we become adults.

Also controversial is what should be included in the annual examination. Some things do need to be evaluated every year and some less often. Many recommendations are dependent on the age group you fall into. There is so much that can be learned by just sitting down and talking about past history and things that are new. That is why a good history is probably the most important aspect of the physical and should be done with every physical. Another important aspect is referred to as risk factor modification. Risk factor modification is identifying things that could lead to illness and changing them to prevent the illness. Common risk factors we look for that we can change can include smoking, high blood pressure, diabetes, overweight, sedentary life style without exercise, excessive stress, high cholesterol and triglyceride levels, alcohol or illegal drug use. All of these have been linked to illness if not changed. Some of the things you can take care of on your own and some you will need some help from your doctor. A healthy life style is often the last thing on our minds because of our hectic lives. With kids and work who has time! The answer should be we all need to make the time. If we do not take care of ourselves, we won’t be around for our kids or grandkids and probably will not be as productive in our jobs.

The least liked part of the physical is the examination and diagnostic testing that is needed. Many feel embarrassed when being examined especially if it involves checking private areas of the body. Others dread the possibility of a needle stick. Unfortunately, both are essential aspects of the exam. Very important but often not even realized your doctor is doing is looking for early signs of dementia. There are many signs that can indicate early stages of dementia, which is the best time to begin treatment. Treatment results are less effective further into the illness. Other diagnostics that might be recommended are checking for blood in your stools, colonoscopy, mammogram, hearing testing, breathing test, EKG, or a stress test.

Anything can be found when it is obvious and possibly too late. The art is finding a problem before it happens or early on so, something can be done that can cure the problem or lessens its impact on you. Do not wait until it is broke before you fix it. If it is your car and you wait too long to fix it you can always get a new car. You do not have the same luxury of getting a new body if you wait too long to fix it. I hope your life is healthy.