Annual Wellness Visit FAQ’s

**What is the Annual Wellness Visit and why is it important?**

The Annual Wellness Visit is a conversation between you and your provider to discuss your health history and any concerns you may have regarding your health, and to review your medications and immunizations. It also is a time when you and your provider review your existing health problems; determine what health issues may become a concern in the future and how to prevent them.

The goals of an Annual Wellness Visit are to create a complete personal and family health history and to help prevent future health problems. The get-together can address concerns, look at preventive measures, and create health goals and expectations.

You might also hear an annual wellness visit called a preventive health visit

**Who should get an Annual Wellness Visit?**

**Depending on your age and gender, your annual wellness exam will focus on different factors and conditions.**

**Birth to 21 Years –** The [American Academy of Pediatrics](https://www.aap.org/en-us/Pages/Default.aspx?nfstatus=401&nftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&nfstatusdescription=ERROR%3a+No+local+token) uses comprehensive guidelines to let parents and pediatricians know how often children should receive wellness visits, along with a vaccination schedule.  As infants, children will need to be seen more frequently, and as they grow, necessary wellness visits will decrease to once per year.  However, even as children age, maintaining regular appointments is important to keep up vaccination schedules, help them adjust to their changing bodies, and detect any potential health concerns which may be problematic.

**21 to 30 Years –** If you are under the age of 30 and in good health, it is recommended that you receive a wellness visit at least every other year.  However, this frequency will increase for anyone who has a history of health problems or who is taking any form of prescription medication.  Women in this age range who are sexually active should also receive[pap smears annually](https://www.lanermc.org/services/baby-lane/obstetrics-and-gynecology/)to screen for signs of cervical cancer.

**30 to 40 Years –** Again, for individuals in this age range who are healthy, bi-annual wellness visits are acceptable.  This is also the age range during which many women will need mammograms.  For those without a history of breast cancer in their family, the recommended age to begin these screenings is 40.  If a family history is present, a physician may recommend that these tests begin at an earlier age.

**50+ Years –** For those who are over the age of 50, annual wellness visits are a must.  Regardless of how you feel and the status of your health thus far, this is the age range when more common health concerns begin to crop up.  Your provider will want to keep careful watch on your blood pressure and cholesterol.  This is also when men and women are encouraged to begin colonoscopies for colon cancer screening.  The test need only be performed every 10 years for most and is the most effective tool we have against this common and very treatable disease.

The power of preventative medicine cannot be overstated. While some may feel that their time and money are better spent elsewhere, annual wellness visits give patients invaluable benefits.  Regular visits with your [provider](https://www.lanermc.org/services/primary-care-family-medicine/) allows him or her to get to know you and your family history.  At the same time, the tests performed can alert them to any potential health conditions that require additional monitoring, meaning you don’t have to wait for things to go wrong in order to correct them.

**What to Bring to Your Annual Wellness Visit**

* Bring notes with details of medical history to your appointment. Your provider should understand everything going on and piece it together.
* A list of all of your medications, including vitamins and supplements
* Names of all of your healthcare providers, including doctors, pharmacists, therapists, home health agencies, and non-traditional providers
* Your immunization records, including flu or pneumonia shots
* Schedule your next annual wellness visit at the end of your appointment

HIPPA laws prevent physicians from sharing information about you with one another without your permission. This is why it is important to bring this information with you to your Annual Wellness Visit, particularly if you see multiple healthcare providers.

**What to Expect**

The Annual Wellness Visit is performed either by your physician, a nurse or a nurse practitioner. You can expect your provider to discuss with you your health history, medications, healthcare team and immunization schedule. Other components of the Annual Wellness Visit are a Health Risk Assessment, a Wellness Schedule, Advance Directives and a Personal Health Record.

**Your Health History**

The AWV begins with your provider collecting your family and personal health history. Your provider may have most of this information, but it is important to provide information that is not in your records to ensure that your health history is correct and complete.

**Medication Review**

Your provider will review your list of medications, including those prescribed by other providers, to ensure that there are no negative interactions. This is a good time to ask questions you may have about your medications.

**Your Healthcare Team**

Your provider will create a comprehensive list of your healthcare team for future reference.

**Immunization Schedule**

Your provider will review your immunizations and determine if you need additional vaccines.

**Health Risk Assessment**

A Health Risk Assessment includes your weight, height and blood pressure. You will be asked such questions as your ability to care for yourself, your memory, whether or not you are depressed, and your smoking and drinking habits. The purpose is to determine if you are at risk for future illnesses. Once the Health Risk Assessment is completed, your provider may recommend screenings in the event some concerns arose during the assessment. These screenings will be performed during a separate visit, and possibly with another provider, depending on the type of screening. Your provider is required to tell you if the screening requires a co-pay.

**The Wellness Schedule**

Medicare requires providers to provide a Wellness Schedule to patients during the Annual Wellness Visit. The Wellness Schedule is a list of all of the screenings you should have during the next five-to-10 years. These screenings can include prostate exams, mammograms and heart-related screenings. Many of these are free to the patient.

**Advance Directives**

While providers are no longer required to give their patients information on Advance Directives – or Living Wills – you can discuss your wishes with your provider and ask about the procedures you need to follow to complete an Advance Directive. Your provider should be able to provide a standard form for you to complete.

**Personal Health Record**

All of the information collected during your Annual Wellness Visit is compiled into one document called a Personal Health Record. You can obtain a copy of your Personal Health Record from your provider. It is a great tool to use when you have to go to the hospital, see other doctors, or visit small clinics. Since healthcare providers are not allowed to discuss your health situation with other providers, the Personal Health Record helps ensure that all of your healthcare providers have your complete health history.

It also can be very helpful to your adult children to have a copy of your Personal Health Record in the event they need to represent you at the hospital or emergency room.

**Be Your Own Advocate**

The Annual Wellness Visit gives you and your provider a complete picture of your health and what you need to do to be healthier. The more you know about your health, the more likely you are to be your own advocate. So, schedule your Annual Wellness Visit, have a great conversation with your provider and stay healthy!

**Where to Schedule a Wellness Exam**

Most health care organizations and professionals recommend setting yourself up with a primary care doctor or hospital network to schedule well person exams. However, if you don't have access to either, there are a few other options.

* **Urgent care centers:** Some urgent care centers can perform many, if not all, of these preventive screenings. Contact your local center to determine if their facilities are sufficient for your needs.
* **University health clinics/medical centers:**If you attend a university, your school's health clinic may perform many of these screenings. Even if you're not enrolled, some universities and medical centers offer more affordable screenings performed by doctors-in-training.
* **Other local doctors:** Many providers, particularly general practitioners and internists, will perform these exams on first-time patients, even if you don't plan to follow up with the same provider each year.
* **Telemedicine:** Telemedicine is becoming increasingly common, especially for rural areas. You will likely have to visit designated testing sites for certain tests and screenings, but others can be performed through video chat with a qualified provider who has the screening results in-hand.

Don't let the lack of a primary care provider stop you from scheduling a regular wellness exam. Taking charge of your health and preventive care will lead to a healthier life.