8. Medical Screenings and Tests
Talking to the Doctor or Health Care Worker

To the Teacher
Screening tests are medical tests that are performed in the absence of symptoms to detect certain diseases. The goal of a screening test is to detect problems when they are still at an early stage and most likely to respond to treatment, or to prevent a disease from occurring at all.

Screening tests exist for certain kinds of cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis. See the chart included in this unit for guidelines as to when such tests should be performed. Exactly when tests should be performed will depend on a number of factors including personal and family health history, age and lifestyle.

Here is some information about the most common medical screenings.

Mammogram
As a screening test, a mammogram is used to detect breast changes in women who have no signs or symptoms of breast cancer. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene recommends that women age 40 and older get a mammograms every one to two years. Women with a family history of breast cancer should consult with their health care provider, about a possible need for more frequent mammograms or an earlier date for screenings.

Unfortunately, many women who should get mammograms do not. According to one study, in 2005 less than half of women on Medicare got mammograms (http://company.ipro.org/index/pr20051017). Take Care New York reports that 1,260 women in New York City die from breast cancer every year.

In New York City, free or low-cost mammograms are available from the city’s six Health and Hospitals Corporation sites. Calling 311 and asking for information about mammograms will provide the locations. Nationally, one can call 1-800-4-CANCER or 1-800-ACS-2345 for free or low-cost testing.

Other sites offer free mammograms and other cancer screenings to qualified uninsured individuals. In Queens:

Queens Healthy Living Partnership
American Cancer Society
97-77 Queens Blvd., Suite 1110 • Rego Park, NY 11374
Phone: (718) 263-2225 Ext:19 or 37 • Fax: (718) 261-0758

A list of other New York locations to obtain free mammograms and other cancer screenings can be found at:

www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/cancer/center/partnerships.htm#content

Pap Smear
A pap smear to screen for cervical cancer should be performed every one to three years in all women who are sexually active and/or over age 21. Sadly, according to statistics reported by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, one in five women in New York City do not follow this recommendation. Those who are least likely to get a pap smear are those who are foreign born...
or Asian. The large majority of deaths from cervical cancer could have been prevented had a pap smear been performed.

*The resources listed above about free and low-cost mammograms are also applicable to obtaining pap smears.*

**Colonoscopy**

A colonoscopy is used to check for early signs of cancer in the colon and rectum. Caught early, colon cancer can almost always be cured. A colonoscopy should be done at the age of 50 and every 10 years after that. Individuals with certain family or personal health histories may need to be checked at an earlier age.

The good news is that the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reports a 30% increase in New Yorkers getting colonoscopies. But despite that increase, at present only 50% of New Yorkers over age 50 have received this screening.

*See the listings under mammograms for free and low-cost colonoscopy screenings.*

**Cholesterol Check**

Cholesterol levels are tested to screen for risk of developing heart disease. According to the American Heart Association, all adults should be tested once every five years. If one is being treated for high cholesterol, screening should be done more frequently.

What is cholesterol? Cholesterol is a fat-like substance that comes from two sources: Some is made naturally by the body, while the rest comes from eating products containing meat, milk or eggs. Foods of vegetable origin do not contain cholesterol. Cholesterol naturally circulates through the body to supply the small amount of cholesterol needed for a normal body functions. Our bodies can make all the cholesterol we need — we do not need a dietary source. However, any excess cholesterol is deposited in the arteries, where it creates a narrowing and blockages of the arteries, and eventually may lead to heart disease.

Not all cholesterol is the same. There are two main types of cholesterol: High-Density Lipoproteins (HDL) and Low-Density Lipoproteins (LDL). We think of HDL as the “good” cholesterol, and LDL (particularly VLDL) as the “bad.” The reason for this is that HDL’s job is to take cholesterol out of the bloodstream, while LDL’s job is to transport cholesterol throughout the body.

**What do cholesterol numbers mean?** The American Heart Association provides the following guidelines (see table at left).

**How can cholesterol levels be lowered?** Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, reducing intake of dietary cholesterol and saturated fat, adding physical exercise, losing weight and stopping smoking can help reduce cholesterol. In some cases, physicians will prescribe medication such as statins if lifestyle changes are not sufficient.
Blood Pressure

Blood pressure is the pressure of the blood against the walls of the arteries. The higher (systolic) number represents the pressure while the heart is beating. The lower (diastolic) number represents the pressure when the heart relaxes between beats.

Normal blood pressure for adults is below 120/80 mmHq (systolic/diastolic). Pressure readings of 120 to 139 mmHg (systolic) or diastolic readings of 80 to 89 mmHg are considered “pre-hypertension” and need to be watched carefully. A blood pressure reading of 140/90 or higher is considered “high.”

High blood pressure is often called the “silent killer,” because the individual usually has no symptoms. However, untreated hypertension can lead to heart disease, kidney failure or stroke.

While high blood pressure levels may be related to such factors as age, race, sex and family history, some lifestyle factors can help to prevent or control it. Losing excess weight (if one is overweight), increasing physical activity, reducing sodium, quitting smoking, lowering stress and reducing alcohol intake may be beneficial.

A physician may prescribe several different types of medications to control high blood pressure, including diuretics, beta blockers, angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors, angiotensin II receptor blockers, and calcium antagonists.

Bone Density Test

A bone density test is used to screen for osteoporosis. A low-density x-ray is taken, usually of a section of the spine and hip. This test measures the mass of calcium and other bone minerals that is packed into a segment of bone. The higher the mineral content is, the denser the bone and the less likely it is to break. It is generally recommended that women over age 65 take this test because they are at high risk for osteoporosis. To prevent osteoporosis, patients should increase calcium and vitamin D intake.

Prostate Screening

There are two screening tests for a prostate exam. One is a digital rectal exam; the other is a blood test, called a Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test. The effectiveness of the blood test remains controversial and some groups, such as the National Cancer Institute, suggest that screening decisions be made on an individual basis. However, the American Cancer Society does recommend annual screening for men over age 50.

Sources

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/wyntk/prostate/page1
www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4473
www.mayoclinic.com/health/high-blood-pressure/DS00100/DSECTION=1
www.mayoclinic.com/health/bone-density-tests/WO00024
www.yourdiseaserisk.harvard.edu/-hcppquiz.pl?lang=english&func=show&page=screening_test
www.harvardvanguard.org/info/infoYrAppt2.asp

National Institutes of Health


American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/CRI_2_3x.asp?rnav=crdg&dt=36
8. Medical Screenings and Tests
Talking to the Doctor or Health Care Worker

Objectives
Learners will:
• Learn basic screenings
• Identify needed screenings for age/gender
• Practice explaining symptoms to doctor

Materials Needed
Board or chart paper
Markers
Pictures: Measuring blood pressure; listening to heart; drawing blood
Audio CD (“What brings you here today?”; “Hi, Ms. Sanchez, I’m Dr. Kang”; “We
need to do some special tests…”)
Handouts: 8a (Listening), 8b (Discussing Symptoms), 8c₁-8c₂ (What screenings do
I need? [2 versions]), 8d (Picture Story [bike accident]), 8e (When is the
appointment?)

Activity 1
Listening
Ask learners to listen to the recorded dialogues [on CD] and identify the True and
Untrue statements on worksheet 8a. Check together.

Activity 2
Practice
Hand out copies of the dialogues from Activity 1. Listen to the first recorded
dialogue for Activity 2 (worksheet 8b). Take a few volunteers to practice as a class.
Then, ask the learners to practice in small groups. One person is the doctor, the
others are patients. Repeat this process for the second dialogue.

Activity 3
Medical Screenings
1. Tell the class, “Today we will talk about medical screenings and tests.”
2. Ask, “When we go to the doctor for a check-up, what will the doctor usually
do?” Write their answers on board. [Elicit: Ask about your health history; check
weight, temperature, blood pressure; do a blood test; do a physical
examination; check your heart]
check blood pressure?” [Elicit: To check for high blood pressure]
4. Show picture of nurse listening to patient’s heart with stethoscope. Ask, “What
is the nurse doing? [Elicit: Listening to the heart]
5. Ask, “Why do we listen to the heart?”
6. Show a picture of nurse drawing blood. Ask, “What is the she/he doing?”

Note: If you have not done #7, Filling Out a Health History, you may need to pre-teach
some vocabulary.
7. Look at the list of screenings for men or women (worksheets 8c-1, 8c-2). Ask learners to read the list and circle any tests they don’t know or can’t identify from pictures. Use native-language dictionaries to translate. Ask, “Yani is 35. What tests does she need? Lidia is 66. What screenings does she need? Ahmed is 22. What tests does he need?” Then ask learners to circle the tests that they should do.

**Activity 4**

**Picture Story**

1. A young girl riding her bicycle
2. Girl falling
3. Girl holding her arm; parent talking with her
4. Parent talking to doctor
5. Doctor examining child’s arm
6. Doctor speaking (with no words in dialogue balloon)

1. Cut up the pictures on worksheet 8d and pass out one set of pictures to each group (about 4 participants each).
2. Ask each group to arrange the pictures to make a story. Circulate to observe and assist them with vocabulary.
3. Ask each group to share its story with the class.
4. As a group or in small groups, write the story.

**Activity 5**

**Listening to Instructions**

1. Hand out worksheet 8e.
2. Ask learners to listen to the recorded conversations [on CD] and write the appointment time for each.
3. Check as a class.
4. Listen to the dialogues a second time to fill in the missing information.
5. Check as a class.

If possible, have someone come to the classroom to demonstrate blood pressure screening.

**Activity 6**

**Following Instructions**

Find pictures to illustrate these activities:

- *Please put on this robe.*
- *Roll up your sleeve.*
- *Open your mouth.*
- *Take off your shirt.*
- *Sit on the table.*

1. Show pictures one at a time for each. Ask, “What is the nurse saying?” Write phrases on the board.
2. Give directions to learners. Ask them to pantomime the activity. Write the answer on the board.

**Assessment**

Administer quiz on health history and medical screenings. Check as a class.
Listen to the dialogue. Then write “True” or “Not true” next to the sentences.

Note: students do not see dialogue.

Nurse: What brings you here today?
Patient: I have a rash.
Nurse: How long have you had the rash?
Patient: Three days.
Nurse: Do you have a fever.
Patient: Yes, I do.

1. The patient has a fever ___true________
2. The patient has a rash. ______ true _____
3. The patient has been sick for 4 days. ____ not true ____

Doctor: Hi, Ms. Sanchez, I’m Dr. Kang.
How are you today?
Patient: My stomach hurts. The pain is very bad.
Doctor: Are you throwing up?
Patient: No.
Doctor: Do you have diarrhea?
Patient: No, but I’ve had a fever for two days.
Doctor: Where is the pain?
Patient: Right here.

1. The patient has diarrhea. _______ not true _____
2. The patient is throwing up _______ not true ____
3. The patient has a fever. _____ true ______

Doctor: How are you feeling today?
Patient: My throat hurts.
Doctor: Any other problems?
Patient: I have a headache, but no fever.
Doctor: How long have you had a headache?
Patient: Four days.

1. The patient has a rash. __________ not true ______
2. The patient has a headache. ______ true __________
3. The patient has had a fever for one week. ____ not true __
Discussing symptoms dialogues
Partner practice

*Listen to the dialogue, then practice with a partner*

Doctor: Hi, Ms. Sanchez, I'm Dr. Kang.
How are you today?
Patient: Not good. My back hurts. The pain is very bad.
Doctor: Any other problem?
Patient: No.

Doctor: Hi, Ms. Sanchez, I'm Dr. Kang.
How are you today?
Patient: Not good. My _________ hurts. The pain is very bad.
Doctor: Any other problem?
Patient: No.

*Listen to the dialogue, then practice with a partner*

Nurse: How are you today?
Patient: I feel sick.
Nurse: What's the matter?
Patient: I have a headache.
Nurse: How long have you had the headache?
Patient: Two days.
Nurse: Do you have a fever?
Patient: No.

Nurse: How are you today?
Patient: I feel sick.
Nurse: What's the matter?
Patient: I have ___________.
Nurse: How long have you had _________________?
Patient: Two days.
Nurse: Do you have a ___________?
Patient: _________
## What Screenings Do I Need?

### Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>My language</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>When?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammogram</td>
<td>Test (x-ray) for breast cancer</td>
<td>Every one to 2 years after age 40.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pap smear</td>
<td>Check for cervical cancer</td>
<td>Every 1-3 years after age 21, or younger if sexually active.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol check</td>
<td>High cholesterol is bad for your heart</td>
<td>Regularly after age 45. Earlier if you smoke, have diabetes or family history of heart disease.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonoscopy</td>
<td>Check for colon cancer</td>
<td>At age 50. Then every 10 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood Pressure</td>
<td>High blood pressure can cause stroke and heart problems.</td>
<td>Every 1-2 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bone Density Test</td>
<td>Check for osteoporosis (thin bones)</td>
<td>At age 65 or earlier for some women.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental Check-up</td>
<td>Check for cavities and problems with you teeth and gums</td>
<td>One or two times a year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## What screenings do I need?

### Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>My language</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>When?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prostate Exam</td>
<td></td>
<td>Test (x-ray) for prostate cancer</td>
<td>Ask your doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA Test (blood test)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Test for prostate cancer</td>
<td>Ask your doctor.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cholesterol check</td>
<td></td>
<td>High cholesterol is bad for your heart</td>
<td>Regularly after age 20.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Listen to the conversations. When is the appointment?
1. Monday morning

2. Thursday at 8 a.m.

3. Friday at 10 a.m.

Listen again and fill in the missing information.

1. Lana has stomach pain.
   Doctor: We need to do some special tests. Your appointment will be on __Monday__ _morning_. On Sunday night, do not _eat_ or _drink_ after _midnight_. Do not _eat_ or drink on Monday.

2. Arsham is at the doctor for a check-up. He is 55 years old.
   Nurse: I'd like to schedule a colonoscopy for you. Your appointment will be on Thursday at 8 a.m. Here is a prescription. You need to drink this __liquid___ the night _before_ your test.

3. Wen is at the doctor for a check-up. She is 43 years old.
   Nurse: Please come back on Friday __ at 10 a.m. for a blood test. Do not eat anything after __10 p.m.__ on Thursday. You may drink some __water__ on Friday morning.
Photo courtesy of Elmhurst Hospital
Sessions 7 and 8
Health History and Medical Screenings

Check True or Not True for each question.

1. You are age 50. Get a colonoscopy every year.
   - [ ] True
   - [x] Not True

2. A mammogram is a screening test.
   - [x] True
   - [ ] Not True

3. Everybody has allergies.
   - [ ] True
   - [x] Not True

4. You are not sick. The nurse will check your blood pressure.
   - [x] True
   - [ ] Not True

5. You are age 60. Get a physical examination (check up) every year.
   - [x] True
   - [ ] Not True
Name _______________________________     Date __________________

Sessions 7 and 8
Health History and Medical Screenings

Check True or Not True for each question.

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   □ True          □ Not True

2. A mammogram is a screening test.
   □ True          □ Not True

3. Everybody has allergies.
   □ True          □ Not True

4. You are not sick. The nurse will check your blood pressure.
   □ True          □ Not True

5. You are age 60. Get a physical examination (check up) every year.
   □ True          □ Not True