

## Women's health screenings to know

It's important for women to keep track of health screening recommendations. Early detection of issues like breast cancer can mean a better outcome.

Since everyone's situation is different, you should talk to your health care provider about what screenings are right for you and when to get them. But [Deena Brown](#), a board-certified family nurse practitioner at OSF HealthCare, says there are a few screenings every woman should know.

- **Breast cancer:** Brown says women aged 40 and up should talk to their provider about a yearly mammogram that looks for breast cancer.

For adult women of any age, mammograms should be combined with monthly breast self-checks. Brown suggests doing a self-exam a week after your menstrual cycle. If you're no longer menstruating, you can choose the same day each month (the first of the month, for example) to help you remember. You should feel for changes or other abnormalities like lumps, bumps, one breast being larger than the other, any nipple discharge and swelling or soreness under the armpit. Make an appointment with your provider if you notice any of those changes.

- **Cervical cancer:** Brown says cervical cancer screenings typically begin at age 21 and occur every three to five years.

"Those screenings involve a pap smear, which takes a cell sample from the cervix and looks for any abnormal cells that need to be addressed," Brown says.

- **Osteoporosis:** The National Institutes of Health (NIH) says osteoporosis is a bone disease that develops when bone mineral density and bone mass decrease or when the structure and strength of bones change. This can lead to a decrease in bone strength and an increased risk of bone fractures.

Brown says women over age 65 should be checked for osteoporosis. The NIH says the screening is typically a simple X-ray, and it should be done every two years.

"If the bone density is low, we can initiate treatment with medication to help increase the strength of the bones," Brown says. "This helps prevent future fractures and debility for women."

- **Colon cancer:** Screenings starting at age 45 can help detect colon cancer and other serious issues. A once-a-decade colonoscopy involves a doctor using a tube and camera to check for polyps or cancer in your colon and rectum. Another option is to take a stool sample at home, send it to a provider and they will look for abnormalities. Talk to your provider about which option is best for you.

### How things can change

Brown says some women may need these screenings more frequently or earlier in life based on a family history of a disease or your own history.

"It's all individualized," she says.

"There are these screening recommendations, but we like to take a personalized approach to care and help address issues as soon as we can."

In other words, seeing a doctor isn't just about treating chronic conditions. It's about preventing them too. And screenings are the best way to do that.

For more on women's health services, visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#).