

# PHYSICAL EXAMS:

What Gets Checked, How Often  
and Why It's Important!



  
**MERIDIAN**  
**HEALTHCARE**  
PRIMARY CARE

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**Physical exams and lab work help your primary care provider get a better picture of your health. Here's what you can expect when you visit your doctor for your next (or first) physical exam.**

## **What Does a Physical Exam Include?**

Your exam will start with the office collecting your basic health information: height, weight, blood pressure, heart rate, temperature, etc. (The purpose is to have this data so that it can be tracked over time for changes.)

Your doctor will then ask you about your prescription medications, as well over-the-counter medications or supplements that you take regularly. Make sure your prescription list is up-to-date!

## **Open and Honest Discussion**

Any smoking, drinking, and drug habits will get reviewed. You will also be asked questions about how much exercise you get and what your sleeping patterns look like. Remember, the doctor is not there to judge you; they're trying to understand your health. Answering honestly helps the doctor help you!



After some initial conversation, the physical exam will continue with a visual assessment, checking your general appearance (this can include looking at your eyes, skin and nails), because physical attributes can contain markers of illness.

Your doctor will then listen to your heart and lungs using a stethoscope, checking for issues like an irregular heartbeat, wheezing, or fluid in the lungs. After that, your doctor will use a scope with a light to examine your eyes, nose, ears, and throat.

Finally, your doctor will examine your abdomen, using palpation (pressing on the abdomen with the hands) and percussion (tapping on the abdomen with the fingers) to check for pain or abnormal buildup of fluid. For men, there may also be a testicular or prostate exam.

## **Laboratory Tests and Screenings**

Following your physical examination, your doctor may order some common screenings or laboratory tests.

Lab tests are used to check your blood and urine for signs of disease. Certain blood tests require you to fast (refrain from eating) for a minimum of eight hours in order to get accurate results.

Recommended screenings vary, depending on the age and gender of the patient.

## Lab Work: Blood Tests

A very common blood test is the Complete Blood Count, or CBC. This test measures the components of your blood: red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets.

Variations in these blood cells are normal depending on gender and age. However, high or low levels of white blood cells can be a sign of infection. Low levels of red blood cells can be a sign of anemia (iron deficiency), and high or low platelet levels can be a sign of internal bleeding.

Another common blood test is a Comprehensive Metabolic Panel, or CMP. This test measures the levels of 14 chemicals in the blood: Alanine aminotransferase, Albumin, Alkaline phosphatase, Aspartate aminotransferase, Bicarbonate, Bilirubin, Blood urea nitrogen, Calcium, Chloride, Creatinine, Glucose, Potassium, Sodium, Total protein

A CMP provides information on many of your body's functions, such as liver and kidney health, metabolic rate, and your blood sugar levels. If the amount of any of these chemicals falls outside of the normal range, it could be a sign of a health problem.

Cholesterol testing is often done for individuals who are at risk for heart disease, stroke and other artery-related conditions. Often, the first step is testing total cholesterol level, but a lipid profile may also be done.

## Lab Work: Urine Tests

A urine test, or urinalysis, may be ordered by your doctor. Testing the urine is a method of confirming urinary tract infections and assessing kidney health.

## Health Screenings: Colonoscopy, Mammograms, Pap Tests

Health screenings often come into play when you reach a certain age. Your doctor will discuss any recommended health screenings with you and then make sure you have an order, if needed, before you leave the office.

According to The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force), colonoscopy screenings, which are used to detect colorectal cancer, are recommended for adults age 45 to 75. The Task Force recommends that adults age 76 to 85 talk to their doctor about screening.

Often, physicians suggest beginning mammography screenings starting around age 40. Mammogram benefits can vary by age, but this test remains the most effective screening available to detect breast cancer.

Regular pap smears are typically recommended for women between the ages of 25 and 65. The tests are typically conducted every three years unless abnormalities are present and require more regular assessment.

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# A Doctor You Can Count On!

If you're in need of a primary care doctor or are in search of an office that feels like a better fit, reach out to Meridian HealthCare today. After all, primary care is the foundation of true wellness!

From preventative care to managing chronic conditions, Meridian's providers work to help each patient achieve better health. See the difference for yourself!

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## Preparing for Your Physical Exam

In addition to fasting for any predetermined blood tests and bringing a list of your medications, there are a few additional things you can do to ensure an effective visit.

Make a list of the health questions you have, even if they're minor. If you've been keeping a food or symptom diary, bring that with you, too, so that your doctor has all the information possible when evaluating your health. And, if you've had certain health concerns on your mind, be sure to write them down so they can be discussed at your visit.

Last but not least, don't be nervous! Regular exams are nothing to worry about. Physical exams, screenings and lab tests are a major part of keeping track of your personal health and taking care of minor problems before they become major ones!



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