

VIP: Healthy VIEWS

SUMMER 2024

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5 important things to discuss with your provider

When life gets busy, it's easy to let health care slip off your to-do list. But if you still need this year's Annual Wellness Visit (AWV), it's time to put it on the calendar.



Make an appointment

Be sure to get an Annual Wellness Visit if you haven't already. To get the most out of your visit, bring a list of the medications, supplements, and herbs you take. Note the dose and how often you take them. Also, discuss care plans from other providers you see.

Think of your AWV as a team huddle with an important goal: a longer, healthier life. You'll talk with your health care provider about all aspects of your well-being—physical and mental.

Together, you can spot small health problems and address them early. And you can make plans to prevent new issues from arising.

Topics to touch on

Once your visit is scheduled, spend a few minutes preparing. Be ready to discuss the following:

1 Workout routine. Make note of how much you're moving now, then ask your provider if you should add more exercise. They can offer tips on the best activities for your fitness level and health goals.

2 Bathroom habits. Having trouble controlling your bowels or bladder is more common with age. Even if you just have minor leaks, bring it up now so things can get better—not worse.

3 Fall risk. Poor eyesight, balance issues, and other health problems may increase your risk of falling. A fall is defined as any time your body goes to the ground accidentally. Tell your provider if you recently took a tumble—even if you didn't end up getting hurt.

4 Emotions. It's normal to feel sad, scared, lonely, or stressed sometimes. But if your bad mood doesn't go away or interferes with daily life, tell your provider. Also speak up if you feel numb or "empty."

5 Health concerns. Providers are experts in medicine, but they can't read your mind. If you have questions or worries about your well-being, bring them to your visit.

Teammates in care

It's normal to feel embarrassed and uncomfortable discussing certain parts of your health. But keep in mind, your provider talks about personal issues all the time. The more open and honest you are, the better care you'll receive. That's a win-win.



3 fitness tips for a longer, healthier life

Regular exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle. It's not just about burning calories or losing weight either. Certain types of movement may be especially good at boosting longevity. Here are three tips to help you stay fit for a longer life:

Build and maintain muscle

At any age, good muscle strength helps with our everyday activities and can lower the risk for cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Work out with free weights, resistance bands, or body weight exercises, like pushups.

Find balance

Balance activities prepare your body to resist forces that cause falls. Strengthening your back, abdominal, and leg muscles will help you stay steady.

Add intensity

Research shows that doing vigorous exercise can increase your odds of a longer life. This means doing things like running or jumping rope. But remember: Any movement is better than none.



Making changes to your fitness routine? Talk with your health care provider about your questions and concerns.

➔ Surprising signs you're not getting enough sleep

Feeling like you need a nap an hour after drinking regular coffee is a pretty clear clue that you're not getting enough sleep. However, there are some more subtle signs that you're lacking z's. Here are three to watch for:

You're hungrier than usual. Skimping on sleep increases levels of a hunger-related hormone and decreases levels of a hormone that helps control how much you consume. What's more, a lack of sleep also causes you to crave higher-calorie foods.

You feel down. Insufficient sleep can take a toll on your mood. You may feel irritable or anxious. Sleeplessness can also make symptoms of depression worse.

You keep getting sick. Sleeping less than the seven or more hours recommended for adults increases your chances of getting sick. Too little time in bed can weaken your immune system.

Sleep-deprived? Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every single day. This helps you fall asleep more easily and stay asleep all night long.



Essential things to know about prostate cancer



Prostate cancer is the most common cancer (other than skin cancer) among American men. About one out of every eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point. Yet as common as this cancer is, many people still don't know a lot about it. Here are three key facts every man should know:

1 The risk of having prostate cancer goes up after age 50.

Age is the most common risk factor for this cancer. And more than two-thirds of new cases occur in men older than 65 years old. Other factors that may increase your risk include being a Black American or having a father or brother who developed the disease.

2 Not every man needs to be tested for prostate cancer.

The prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test measures how much PSA is present in your blood. This test can often find prostate cancer early before symptoms arise. But it's not 100% consistent. An infection or other noncancerous factors could cause a high PSA. And some men with low PSA levels can turn out to have cancer, too.

Researchers are working to develop better screening methods for prostate cancer. In the meantime, experts recommend that men talk with their health care providers. Together, they can make informed choices about whether PSA testing is the right choice.

3 The outlook is excellent for most men with prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer can be life-threatening once it spreads to distant parts of the body. But when it's caught earlier, the five-year relative survival rate is nearly 100%. The five-year survival rate for all stages of prostate cancer combined is 98%.

This means that, on average, men with prostate cancer are nearly as likely as those without cancer to have long lives. In fact, there are more than 3.1 million prostate cancer survivors in the U.S. today.

Have you been screened lately?

Talk with your provider about other cancer screenings you might need. Important ones include breast and cervical for women and colon, lung, or skin cancer for everyone.

Q&A: How to prevent—and control—high blood pressure

Q. What causes high blood pressure?

A. People have high blood pressure, or hypertension, if their blood pressure is 130/80 mmHg or higher, according to the American Heart Association. Scientists believe that genes, health conditions, and lifestyle habits—such as diet and exercise—may be related. Without proper treatment, high blood pressure can be a serious problem and may lead to stroke, heart disease, and other conditions.

Q. Who is most at risk for high blood pressure?

A. High blood pressure affects about half of adults in the United States. You may be more likely to develop hypertension if you:

- Have elevated (slightly higher than normal) blood pressure—that is where the top number ranges from 120 to 129 mmHg and the bottom number is below, not above, 80 mmHg
- Are older than age 65
- Have diabetes
- Smoke
- Have a family history of hypertension
- Are overweight

Race may also play a role. According to the CDC, Black Americans develop high blood pressure more often—and at an earlier age—than people who are White, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaska Native.

Q. Can I avoid developing high blood pressure?

A. Healthy lifestyle choices may help prevent as well as control high blood pressure. A few habits you can incorporate into your routine include:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Watching your salt intake
- Limiting alcohol to one or two drinks a day
- Getting 30 minutes of physical activity a day, five days a week
- Eating a low-fat diet rich in fruits, vegetables, dairy products, whole grains, fish, and lean meats
- Getting enough calcium and other minerals
- Not smoking

If lifestyle alone doesn't control your high blood pressure, talk with your health care provider. They may prescribe you medication to help manage it. Taking these steps can keep you healthy now and in the future.

24/7 Nurse Call Line

If you have any questions about your care, call to speak with a nurse, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The number is **1-855-843-1147 (TTY: 711)**.

Take care of your kidneys when you have other chronic conditions



Many people with chronic kidney disease (CKD) also have other long-term health concerns.

Diabetes and high blood pressure are especially common. If you have one (or both) of these conditions, as well as CKD, here's good news. You can take steps to protect your kidneys and manage your overall health.

Diabetes, high blood pressure, and CKD

First, it helps to understand how all these conditions are related. Diabetes and high blood pressure are major causes of CKD. If they aren't controlled, they can keep harming your kidneys. For example:

- High blood sugar from diabetes can damage blood vessels in your kidneys.
- High blood pressure can damage arteries around your kidneys, reducing the flow of blood to the organs.

Taking charge of your blood sugar and blood pressure helps prevent CKD from getting worse. It also reduces your risk of developing further health problems, such as heart disease.

Tips for a healthy life and happy kidneys

These steps can help you manage diabetes and high blood pressure—and, as a result, help keep your kidneys working better for longer:

- **Ask your provider to set blood sugar and blood pressure targets for you.** Then work together to achieve these goals.
- **Take any recommended medications as directed.** Talk with your provider about options that help protect your kidneys.
- **Eat a healthy diet—and know what that means for you.** Choosing the right foods may take a little extra thought when you have both diabetes and CKD. A registered dietitian can offer personalized advice.
- **Find physical activities you enjoy and keep moving.** Along with improving blood sugar and blood pressure control, staying active may reduce your risk for heart disease.

Get your kidney values checked regularly to see how well your kidneys are doing. If needed, your provider can adjust your meds or suggest new lifestyle changes. That way, you can stay on track with all your health conditions.

Know your ABCS

If you have diabetes, paying attention to your ABCS can help to prevent future health problems. This stands for:

A **A1c.** This is a blood test that measures your average blood glucose level over the past few months. Aim to stay in your target range as much as possible.

B **Blood pressure.** Healthy blood pressure helps prevent heart attack, stroke, and kidney and eye damage. The goal for most people with diabetes is less than 140/90 mmHg.

C **Cholesterol.** Managing your cholesterol helps prevent heart attack and stroke. Talk with your provider about a goal that is good for you.

S **Smoking.** Stop smoking or don't start.

Making the right match— How to choose a PCP

You and your primary care provider (PCP) share an important relationship focused on one thing—your health. To get the most out of your care, it's important to choose a provider who you're comfortable with and fits your needs. Where do you begin?

List your priorities

Before you start your search, think about what's important to you in a PCP and their office. Some examples might include:

- What type of provider they are, such as a family practitioner or internist—both are trained physicians but have a slightly different focus
- If the provider has experience or a specialty in a health condition, such as diabetes or asthma
- If their office accepts your health insurance

- Which hospital the provider is affiliated with
- If the provider offers telehealth services
- If the office location and hours are convenient

Get personal references

One of the best ways to find a good provider is to get referrals from people you trust. Ask your family and friends which PCP they see and what they like about them. If you are new to the area, see if the local hospital provides suggestions. Make a list of the physicians you are interested in pursuing.

Ask questions

Call the PCP's office first on your list and speak with the office staff. Find out if the physician meets your initial criteria, is accepting new patients, and takes your health insurance.

Meet face-to-face

Schedule an initial visit with the provider. You'll likely be asked to fill out some new patient paperwork, so come prepared with your medical history and current list of medicines. After your visit, ask yourself the following questions. Did the provider:

- Spend adequate time with me?
- Make me feel comfortable?
- Answer my questions?
- Explain things so I could understand?

Remember, you and your PCP are a team in your health care efforts. Take the time to ensure you have the right partner.

First Choice VIP Care Plus cares about you

Our team of Care Managers and Personal Care

Connectors are here to help you. We can:

- Answer questions about your health and medicines
- Schedule provider appointments and arrange transportation for you
- Help you find community resources for housing, food, and clothing

Call our Care Management team at 1-888-978-0862 (TTY: 711) to get started.





Feeling lonely? You're not alone

Even if you have friends, it's possible to feel alone or disconnected from others. Why? Not all friendships are close, meaningful relationships or offer a sense of belonging. Loneliness results from the difference between the level of connection you want and the level you have.

Ways to connect with others

There are many ways to build more social connections. What works will not be the same for everyone. The CDC offers these ideas:

- Meet new people by volunteering; taking a class; or joining a book, sports, art, or other club.
- Invite others to join you for exercise, meals, and other activities you already do. This can help with a busy schedule.
- Do not let technology use keep you from interacting with people.

How to get support

If you aren't comfortable talking with a loved one, there are other ways to get support. Open up to your health care provider about your feelings and concerns. They can take steps to help you get better, such as referring you to a mental health care provider, if needed.

To find health care professionals, programs, and support groups now, visit www.samhsa.gov/find-support.

Get help in a crisis

In a crisis, seek help right away. You can get emotional support from **988 Lifeline Chat and Text**. To talk with a trained counselor, call or text **988** or chat online at <https://988lifeline.org/chat>.

Healthy recipe



Summer salad

Ingredients

2 cups chopped romaine
1/3 cup blue cheese dressing
1/2 cup blueberries
1/4 cup chopped walnuts
2 oz. crumbled feta cheese
8 oz. grilled chicken breast, chopped

Directions

1. Divide your lettuce between two serving bowls and set them aside.
2. Divide the salad dressing in half and pour it over the lettuce in the bowls.
3. Next, divide the toppings (blueberries, walnuts, feta cheese, and grilled chicken) between the two bowls.
4. Toss it all together as desired and enjoy!

Per serving

Serves two; serving size is one salad.
Each serving provides: 556 calories, 37 g total fat (8 g saturated fat, less than 1 g trans fat), 115 mg cholesterol, 749 mg sodium, 11 g total carbohydrate, 3 g dietary fiber, 7 g sugars, 45 g protein.



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First Choice VIP Care Plus is a health plan that contracts with both Medicare and South Carolina Healthy Connections Medicaid to provide benefits of both programs to enrollees.



Sun vs. skin: Protect yourself this summer

To reduce your risk for skin cancer and to keep your skin looking younger, follow this advice:

- Cover all exposed skin with a liberal amount of a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30.
- Wear protective clothing, such as a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses.
- Seek shade. Remember that the sun's rays are strongest from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Use extra caution near water and sand. They reflect the damaging rays of the sun, increasing the odds for sunburn.
- Check your birthday suit. If you notice anything on your skin changing, bleeding, or itching, see a dermatologist.



You can get this information for free in other languages. Please call Member Services at **1-888-978-0862 (TTY: 711)**, seven days a week, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The call is free. **ATENCIÓN:** Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame a Servicios al Miembro de First Choice VIP Care Plus al **1-888-978-0862 (TTY: 711)**, los siete días de la semana, de 8 a.m. a 8 p.m. La llamada es gratuita.