

Top preventive health tips your internist wants you to know

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Prevention is the best medicine. It has been a common refrain in doctors' offices for decades now. But many people can find it difficult to take preventive actions, especially if they do not know what the latest recommendations are.

Here is a list from the AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series—which provides physicians with a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines—on some important preventive health tips that internists want their patients to know.

1 If you're 65 or older, know about—and take advantage of—Medicare annual wellness visits

There has been a shift toward preventive measures in health care. This can be seen in Medicare annual wellness visits, which have emerged as a key element in promoting overall health and well-being among patients enrolled in the government program.

But there is some confusion about what distinguishes a traditional physical exam from the Medicare annual wellness visit. As these terms are often used interchangeably, it is essential to clarify their distinct purposes and components to help patients make informed decisions about their health care needs. Two AMA member physicians took time to discuss what patients need to know

about annual wellness visits.

2 Be quick to identify the symptoms of stroke and seek help

Every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. has a stroke—a medical emergency that demands swift action. This translates to more than 795,000 people annually, and for nearly 25% of them, it isn't their first time.

Stroke is the fifth-leading cause of death in the U.S. and a major cause of long-term disability for adults, but it is preventable. Two physicians took time to discuss what patients need to know about preventing it and also identifying it when it strikes.

3 Head off heart disease by combining medical and lifestyle steps

One person dies every 34 seconds in the U.S. from heart disease. On top of this, heart disease carries a huge financial cost—about \$229 billion each year from 2017 to 2018, for example. This includes the cost of health care services, medicines and lost productivity due to death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Yet heart disease is not inevitable—there are ways to reduce your risk. An internist, who is also vice president of cardiovascular health at the AMA, laid out what patients need to know about preventing heart disease.

4 Know the risk factors for breast cancer and the best ways to screen for it

It's natural for women to worry about breast cancer, especially since many people know someone who was touched by the disease. In fact, breast cancer is the second-most common cancer among women in the U.S. And while rare,

men can get breast cancer too.

Although there is no foolproof way to prevent breast cancer, there are things you can do to lower your risk. An internist, who is also a senior physician adviser for the AMA and an associate editor for *JAMA*[®], went through these steps in detail.

5 Start colon cancer screening earlier—it's now recommended at 45

Colorectal cancer—which refers to cancer of the colon or the rectum—is the second-leading cause of cancer death in the U.S. And it doesn't seem to show any signs of slowing: The rates of colorectal cancer are rising in adults 20 through 49. Yet about 30% of patients who are eligible in the U.S. still have not been screened for it. Two physicians took time to discuss what patients need to know about colorectal cancer.

6 Cut excessive sodium intake by first knowing its sources

While sodium is an essential nutrient, most people consume too much of it and are not even aware they are doing so. The body needs a small amount of sodium to work properly, but in excess it can increase a person's risk for high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. That is why it is important to understand where most salt intake is coming from and how to lower it. An internist outlined what patients need to know about sodium consumption and how to get it under control.

7 Know the health risks of vitamins and supplements and choose them carefully

While taking vitamins and nutritional or dietary supplements can be beneficial to your health, it can also pose health risks. In fact, many consumers probably

don't know that the Food and Drug Administration does not have the authority to review dietary supplement products for safety and effectiveness before they are marketed. And with more than 90,000 supplements on the market, it can be a real challenge to discern which ones are safe and which ones aren't. Two AMA members took time to discuss what doctors want patients to know about vitamins and nutritional supplements.

When it comes to effective doctor-patient communication, it's important that both parties are speaking from a base of shared knowledge. The AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know series explores dozens of health topics, including [birth control](#), [pink eye](#) and [heat stroke](#).