

HEALTH

TESTING TIMES

Are you one of those women who shudder to go to doctors for medical check-ups? Then, think again! SAVIA RAJAGOPAL tells you the significance of these tests

WITH hectic lifestyles and demanding schedules, it is important to take charge of your health once you turn 30. Most medical experts agree on a few mandatory tests.

THE ANNUAL HEALTH CHECK

Must for: Women between 30 to 40 years should go for it at least once in two years. **What is it:** Height, weight, blood pressure,

heart and lungs are reviewed along with medication taken, family history and lifestyle habits.

Expert Speak: Dr. Rohit Barman, general physician, Breach Candy Hospital, explains, "Important checks include a chest X-ray, Electro Cardiograms (ECG), testing of blood, urine and stool samples." Dr. Rupa Sharma – Nanda, consultant physician, NM Healthcare, adds that women should undergo a DEXA SCAN to identify osteopenia and osteoporosis, which are sub-clinical conditions. She says, "Earlier, DEXA SCAN was not necessary for younger women but with sedentary lifestyles, osteopenia is more prevalent now."

BLOOD TESTS

Must for: All women, irrespective of age group, should take a blood test to check for any blood abnormalities. **What is it:** Blood tests include blood sugar, lipid profile and serum creatinine to identify any small derangement in kidney functions. **Expert Speak:** Usually blood tests are recommended when a patient

goes for the annual check-up. The components of the blood test vary depending on the health concerns of the woman. Most pathology laboratories offer a basic range of tests that are included in the 'routine blood test' category. CBC (Complete Blood Count): Says Dr. Sharma - Nanda, "Basic CBC tests haemoglobin, the total and differential blood count including ESR which, tells you about infections or disease in the body." Blood Sugar: Blood sugar tests are done primarily to evaluate the level of sugar in a person's blood, and to rule out diabetes. The most common method is fasting blood sugar test. Lipid Profile: Blood tests also measure the level of cholesterol in the blood. A high amount can increase risk for heart problems.

TSH (Thyroid stimulating hormone) test: Hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism are two possibilities. There are more women suffering from hypothyroid of late.

BREAST EXAMINATION

Must for: Women over 30 must undergo a mammography to test for breast tumours, cysts and nodules once in two years. Those over 50 must undergo it annually. **What is it:** Mammography uses a low-dose x-ray system for examining breasts. **Expert Speak:** Dr. Sharma – Nanda explains, "Mammography helps to identify any malignancies in the early stages." Dr. Meera Agarwal, gynaecologist – obstetrician advocates women should be taught self-breast examination. She also insists that women should undergo a clinical breast examination from a doctor especially if she has family history of breast cancer as it puts her in a higher risk group. Discuss your detailed history –menstrual, obstetric, and personal with the doctor.

GYNAEC CHECK

Must for: Women who are sexually active and those over the age of 30. **What is it:** The Pap test (also called a Pap smear) checks for changes in the cells of the cervix. Pap smear and pelvic exam are important screenings. **Expert Speak:** The pelvic exam and Pap Test should be conducted by a qualified gynaecologist. Dr. Indira Hinduja, obstetrician and gynaecologist, says, "Women should also undergo a PAP smear, which checks for cancer. The pelvic examination checks the uterus and ovaries. Sonography involves viewing the ovaries and uterus for any developing tumours." Dr. Kiran Coelho, Head of Gynaecology, Lilavati hospital, adds, "Every sexually active woman should screen herself for cervical cancer via the PAP Smear test."

