



# THE SEVEN HEALTH TESTS THAT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE

**There's no doubting that where it comes to seeing their GP and getting the health checks they need, women top men. But not every woman is on track. Are you?**

We've compiled a list of the most important health checks – what they are, why you need them and how often you should get them done.

## **01: BLOOD PRESSURE**

It's vital that your blood is put under a certain amount of pressure – otherwise it wouldn't flow through your arteries and veins, delivering oxygen and nutrients to every cell in your body. But if the pressure is too high, you have hypertension (high blood pressure). And, hypertension can quietly damage your body for years without necessarily showing any symptoms. Around a third

heart disease and stroke in Australia. Scarily, even if you have hypertension, you may not have any symptoms. A normal range of blood pressure is around 120/80 mmHg – if it is much higher or lower, your GP will recommend more testing.

Haven't had a test in a while? Go and see your GP especially if you haven't been tested for around two years. If you're taking the contraceptive pill, your GP may suggest more frequent testing.

## **02: DIABETES**

One Australian is diagnosed with diabetes every five minutes.

haven't been diagnosed yet say Diabetes Australia<sup>ii</sup>. The majority of people have type 2 diabetes which is associated with being overweight – and especially with having belly fat. Symptoms can include thirst and running to the loo, but sometimes there are no symptoms at all.

And, if it is left untreated, levels of blood glucose build up which can damage delicate nerves and blood vessels, eventually leading to heart and kidney disease, blindness and even amputation.

A simple blood test can pick up the presence of high levels of glucose (blood sugar); it is done after an overnight fast. If you are overweight or have raised blood cholesterol levels and especially if you're of Asian, Middle Eastern or Pacific Islander descent, get your self checked-out starting at the age of around 35. Speak with your GP for more advice.

**As a guide, normal blood pressure is generally around 120/80 mmHg – much higher or lower than that and you may need further tests.**

of Australians are affected by hypertension, equivalent to around 4.6 million people<sup>i</sup>. Hypertension is a major factor in

Around 1.7 million of us have diabetes and, there are thought to be around half a million people who already have diabetes but

## **03: BREAST SCREENING**

This is the best way to find breast cancer early and therefore begin the appropriate treatment.

**1300 782 810**

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Go along for a regular test every two years from the age of 40. Women aged 50-74 are invited to be screened for free as part of the government's BreastScreen Australia program<sup>iii</sup>. And, if there is a family history of breast cancer in your family, your GP will advise you to come early and perhaps more often for screening.

**04: PAP SMEAR**

Not much fun, true, but a pap smear is a very effective way to pick up the early signs of cervical cancer. A swab is taken from your cervix and sent away for testing to a lab. Your GP can give you your results just two weeks afterwards. Book a screening with your GP every two years<sup>iv</sup>.

**05: SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS (STIs)**

There are a number of sexually transmissible infections out there. If you are having sex, think about seeing your GP or local sexual health clinic to be tested.

fatty material is deposited in the arteries, the blood supply is narrowed. This means that vital oxygen and nutrients can't nourish the cells. It also increases your risk of heart attack.

A blood test can check the levels of cholesterol and triglycerides, and high levels may mean that you're at increased risk of heart

You may need other regular tests too – it all depends upon you and your medical history. Your GP can give you more information.

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As a not-for-profit health fund, we are still Australian owned and are proud to value people over profits.

**LIKE TO KNOW MORE?**

Call 1300 782 810 and you'll always speak with a person – not a machine.

**STI testing is especially important if you think you might have a sexually transmissible infection, you're having unprotected sex of any kind, your partner has had previous sexual partners or if you are starting a new sexual relationship.**

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**06: BLOOD FATS**

The amount and type of fats in your blood play a significant role in your risk of developing heart disease. That's because when

disease. If you're over 45, get your blood tested every five years but if you're in a high-risk group, your GP will monitor you more closely.

**07: BONE DENSITY**

If you have concerns about the density of your bones, or if your GP suggests it, you may need to have a bone density (DXA) test. This can indicate the future risk of the bone-thinning disease, osteoporosis.

<sup>i</sup>Heart Foundation. High blood pressure statistics. <http://bit.ly/2ba59Uu>. <sup>ii</sup>Diabetes Australia. Diabetes in Australia. <http://bit.ly/1WhzS2s>. <sup>iii</sup>Cancer Council Australia. Breast cancer screening program. <http://bit.ly/1i2jEna>. <sup>iv</sup>Cancer Council NSW. Screening for cervical cancer - information about testing. <http://bit.ly/2btbrpj>.

