

Empowering the Citizen Patient

Actionable Tips, Information & Resources to Support Your Health & Health Care

Article #7

Healthy People, Healthy Communities
The Benefits of Early Screening for Your Health &
Launch of KBScreen.ca Service



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In this article of our monthly 10-part “Empowering the Citizen Patient” series, Dr. Mindy Smith, retired family physician and active member of the Kootenay Boundary Patient Advisory Committee, shares the benefits of early screening for your health. Join us as we continue our journey to empower both patients and those who care for them.

For many of us, staying healthy, especially as we age, is a top priority. One of the most effective ways to maintain health is through what practitioners call ‘preventive care’, including screening tests that can identify health problems before you have symptoms. This kind of early detection can significantly alter the course of many diseases, particularly chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. They help catch issues before they become severe, greatly improving the chances of successful treatment.

Detecting Health Problems Early

A whole range of health problems can be detected with screening, from high blood pressure and diabetes to more subtle conditions like hearing and vision loss. Early detection of these conditions can prevent serious consequences such as heart attacks, strokes, and accidents due to sensory impairments.

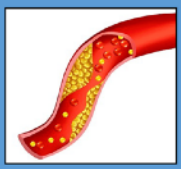
[The Canadian Lifetime Prevention Schedule](#), available online, guides you to the types of prevention screenings that you might need based on your age and family history. While not all tests are guaranteed to improve outcomes, the benefits of preventive screening are proven, with an estimated reduction in death rates due to the targeted diseases of 10–30%.




Types of Screening You Might Need

BC SCREENING GUIDELINES


- Lipid panel for all men over 40 and all women over 50
- Screen earlier if high risk




- Screen all patients over 40 for diabetes
- A1c or fasting glucose every 3 years




- Goal with automated cuff is less than 135/85
- Home readings can confirm diagnosis of hypertension



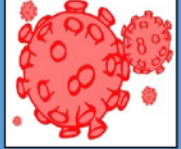
- Low dose CT if patient 55 to 74
- AND
- 30 pack year smoking history




- Thyroid testing not recommended unless symptomatic




- HIV test every 5 years; every 1 year if high risk
- All patients ages 18 to 70



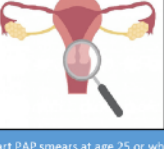
- Mammography becomes available at age 40
- Frequency depends on risks




- PSA testing not generally recommended
- Patients may choose testing if they are at high risk or have concerns



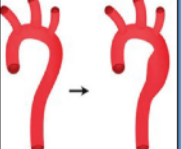
- Start PAP smears at age 25 or when first sexually active (whichever is later)
- Continue testing until age 69




- Vitamin D screening rarely indicated
- Many people are deficient; if suspected, just supplement




- One time U/S to look for AAA
- Men ages 65 to 80




- BMD test if moderate FRAX score
- AND
- Patient is over 65



- Vitamin B12 screening only indicated if symptomatic



- FIT test every two years if no significant risk factors
- All patients age 50 to 74



Designed by Dr. Svetlana Hadziin, FMRP
April 2023; Adapted from most up-to-date versions of BC Screening Guidelines

For many of us, staying healthy, especially as we age, is a top priority. One of the most effective ways to maintain health is through what practitioners call 'preventive care', including screening tests that can identify health problems before you have symptoms. This kind of early detection can significantly alter the course of many diseases, particularly chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. They help catch issues before they become severe, greatly improving the chances of successful treatment.

Start Screening Early!

For families, the importance of screening starts early. When I was in practice, I recommended a vision test once for children between ages 3–5 years and regular check-ups to monitor their growth, weight and overall development. Check out kb.fetchbc.ca for a list of services available in Kootenay Boundary, including free developmental check-ins with early childhood professionals through the family action network (FAN) for residents of the Lower Columbia.



BC's Medical Service Plan covers yearly optometrist visits for children through the BC Healthy Kids Program – though some clinics will charge a small fee. During adolescence, additional screenings for tobacco and substance use, and for mental health issues are crucial. Catching mental health concerns early can be life-saving, especially during the stressful teen years.

For Adults

For adults, checking for high blood pressure at least once every 2 years is recommended. This can be done at a clinician's office, pharmacy, or during local screening events. Blood pressure machines are also available at many stores and are easy to use and very helpful for tracking how well high blood pressure treatments are working.

Talking with your healthcare provider, an Aboriginal Health Coordinator and family may be a good way to begin thinking about what screening may be right for you. Consider asking for a risk assessment test, every 3-5 years, to help determine if you should be screened for high blood sugar (diabetes) and heart disease, and how often. For men who are or were smokers, an ultrasound scan can detect an aneurysm (weakness in the wall) of the aorta; if large, surgical repair can prevent death from rupture. Shared decision making with your care provider is an empowering tool to understand what screening may be best for you and your family members.

Osteoporosis, another condition that can be stealthy yet debilitating, affects nearly 27% of women over 65 years. A one-time scan, called DEXA, can lead to early treatment and prevent serious fractures.

Several infections can be detected and successfully treated to prevent long-term complications. These include sexually-transmitted infections (recommended for sexually-active adolescents and others at high risk or during pregnancy) and hepatitis C (for those born between 1945-1965).

Cancer screenings are available for breast (every 2-3 years for biological females age 50-74 years), cervical (every 3 years ages 25-69 years with conventional testing or every 5 years for ages 30-65 using HPV-based testing), colon (stool testing every 2 years or colonoscopy every 10 years for ages 50-74 years), and lung cancer (yearly for 3 years for smokers or former smokers ages 55-74 years). Free mammograms for breast cancer screening for people age 40 and older can be scheduled by calling [1-800-663-9203](tel:1-800-663-9203), but you must have a current healthcare provider. Your clinician can perform cervical cancer screening using a PAP or HPV test, provide test kits for stool testing for colon cancer, and refer patients for colonoscopy or lung cancer screening. You can order a free cervical cancer test kit to do self-testing for the HPV virus with or without a healthcare provider by calling [1-877-702-6566](tel:1-877-702-6566) or online at BC Cancer Cervix Screening.

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Introducing the KBScreen.ca Service!

In a step towards increasing accessibility to these vital preventive services, a new virtual clinic in Kootenay Boundary opened in June 2024. The KBScreen.ca clinic helps arrange screenings for patients who do not have a family practitioner including breast, cervical, colon and lung cancer as well as abdominal aortic aneurysm, HIV and syphilis testing.

“Our goal is to ensure that everyone, especially those without a primary care practitioner, has access to necessary preventive care,” said Tanya Peever, the clinic’s Nurse Practitioner.

For more information, patients are asked to visit [KBScreen.ca](https://kbscreen.ca). And if you do not have a family practitioner, please register as soon as possible on Kootenay Boundary’s Health Connect Registry at kbhcr.ca.



KB Screen
Preventive Screening for Unattached Patients

KB Screen is a virtual service offering age-related routine screening for residents of Kootenay Boundary who don't currently have a primary care provider. *

Preventive care through screening not only saves lives but also enhances the quality of life, proving that a little foresight can go a long way!



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