

COMMON SCREENING AND DIAGNOSTIC TESTS EXPLAINED



womenshealth.gov

I-800-994-9662

TDD: I-888-220-5446

Test Name	Definition
Angiogram	Exam of your blood vessels using x-rays. The doctor inserts a small tube into the blood vessel and injects dye to see the vessels on the x-ray.
Barium enema	A lubricated enema tube is gently inserted into your rectum. Barium flows into your colon. An x-ray is taken of the large intestine.
Biopsy	A test that removes cells or tissues for examination by a pathologist to diagnose for disease. The tissue is examined under a microscope for cancer or other diseases.
Blood test	Blood is taken from a vein in the inside elbow or back of the hand to test for a health problem.
Bone mineral density (BMD) test	Special x-rays of your bones are used to test if you have osteoporosis, or a weakening of the bones.
Bronchoscopy	Exam of the lungs. A bronchoscope, or flexible tube, is put through the nose or mouth and into your windpipe (trachea).
Clinical breast exam (CBE)	A doctor, nurse, or other health professional uses his or her hands to examine your breasts and underarm areas to find lumps or other problems.
Chest x-ray	An x-ray of the chest, lungs, heart, large arteries, ribs, and diaphragm.
Colonoscopy	An examination of the inside of the colon using a colonoscope, inserted into the rectum. A colonoscope is a thin, tube-like instrument with a light and lens for viewing. It may also have a tool to remove tissue to be checked under a microscope for disease.
Computed tomographic (CT or CAT) scan	The patient lies on a table and x-rays of the body are taken from different angles. Sometimes, a fluid is used to highlight parts of the body in the scan.
Echocardiogram	An instrument (that looks like a microphone) is placed on the chest. It uses sound waves to create a moving picture of the heart. A picture appears on a TV monitor, and the heart can be seen in different ways.
Electroencephalogram (EEG)	Measures the electrical activity of the brain, using electrodes that are put on the patient's scalp. Sometimes patients sleep during the test.
Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG)	Records the electrical activity of the heart, using electrodes placed on the arms, legs, and chest.
Exercise stress test	Electrodes are placed on the chest, arms, and legs to record the heart's activity. A blood pressure cuff is placed around the arm and is inflated every few minutes. Heart rate and blood pressure are taken before exercise starts. The patient walks on a treadmill or pedals a stationary bicycle. The pace of the treadmill is increased. The response of the heart is monitored. The test continues until target heart rate is reached. Monitoring continues after exercise for 10 to 15 minutes or until the heart rate returns to normal.
Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)	Detects hidden blood in a bowel movement. There are two types: the smear test and flushable reagent pads.

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Laparoscopy	A small tube with a camera is inserted into the abdomen through a small cut in or just below the belly button to see inside the abdomen and pelvis. Other instruments can be inserted in the small cut as well. It is used for both diagnosing and treating problems inside the abdomen.
Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)	A test that uses powerful magnets and radio waves to create a picture of the inside of your body without surgery. The patient lies on a table that slides onto a large tunnel-like tube, which is surrounded by a scanner. Small coils may be placed around your head, arm, leg, or other areas.
Mammogram	X-rays of the breast taken by resting one breast at a time on a flat surface that contains an x-ray plate. A device presses firmly against the breast. An x-ray is taken to show a picture of the breast. Mammography is used to screen healthy women for signs of breast cancer. It can also be used to evaluate a woman who has symptoms of disease. It can, in some cases, detect breast cancers before you can feel them with your fingers.
Medical history	The doctor or nurse talks to the patient about current and past illnesses, surgeries, pregnancies, medications, allergies, use of alternative therapies, vitamins and supplements, diet, alcohol and drug use, physical activity, and family history of diseases.
Pap test	The nurse or doctor uses a small brush to take cells from the cervix (opening of the uterus) to look at under a microscope in a lab.
Pelvic exam	A doctor or nurse asks about the patient's health and looks at the vaginal area. The doctor or nurse checks the fallopian tubes, ovaries, and uterus by putting two gloved fingers inside the vagina. With the other hand, the doctor or nurse will feel from the outside for any lumps or tenderness.
Physical exam	The doctor or nurse will test for diseases, assess your risk of future medical problems, encourage a healthy lifestyle, and update your vaccinations.
Positron emission tomography (PET) scan	The patient is injected with a radioactive substance, such as glucose. A scanner detects any cancerous areas in the body. Cancerous tissue absorbs more of the substance and looks brighter in images than normal tissue.
Sigmoidoscopy	The sigmoidoscope is a small camera attached to a flexible tube. This tube, about 20 inches long, is gently inserted into the colon. As the tube is slowly removed, the lining of the bowel is examined.
Spirometry	The patient breathes into a mouthpiece that is connected to an instrument called a spirometer. The spirometer records the amount and the rate of air that is breathed in and out over a specified time. It measures how well the lungs exhale.
Ultrasound	A clear gel is put onto the skin over the area being examined. An instrument is then moved over that area. The machine sends out sound waves, which reflect off the body. A computer receives these waves and uses them to create pictures of the body.

Note: Anesthesia (medicine to block pain or sedate you) is given during some of these tests to keep you comfortable. Be sure to talk with your doctor or nurse about what to expect during and after tests, and how to prepare for tests.