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Make the most of your wellness visit

What to Expect at a Primary Care Wellness/Preventive Visit

Wellness visits focus on your **long-term health over time**, including cancer prevention, heart health, and tracking changes before they become problems.

Wellness visit topics

1. Health goals and concerns
2. Personal and family health history
3. Preventive screenings based on age, sex, and risk factors *
4. Lifestyle factors: sleep, nutrition, physical activity, tobacco, alcohol
5. Immunizations: Vaccines, including Hepatitis B and HPV, offer protection against infectious diseases and some cancers.
6. What to watch + when to follow up

What you should leave with

- Your concerns heard
- Clear next steps
- Follow-up plan

Bottom line

Regular preventive care helps you build a long-term relationship with a doctor who knows your baseline and can help you notice and track health changes over time.

* Your personal doctor may not be familiar with firefighter-specific screenings that might be offered through your employer or occupational health.

Read + review before your visit

Make the most of your wellness visit

Wellness Visit Tips

Scheduling tips

1. **Find a doctor you trust:** Look for one who listens, explains their reasoning, and partners with you on next steps. Your crew can be a good source of recommendations.
2. **Plan ahead.** Wellness visits can book out weeks or months in advance.
3. **Book now.** If you have to miss it, reschedule.
4. **Schedule a separate visit for new or ongoing symptoms,** so your care team can give those concerns the time they need.

Prepare for your visit by writing down:

- Family history of cancer, heart disease, or other chronic conditions (see next page)
- What is most important for you discuss
- Questions you have (e.g., based on recent bloodwork)

Communication tips

Be clear about who you are and the demands of your job:

- "I'm a firefighter, and my job exposes me to smoke, chemicals, and other carcinogens."
- "My work is physically intense and high stress."
- "I often have disrupted sleep because of shift work and calls."
- "I understand my job demands can raise my risk for cancer and heart disease."

State your concerns and goals:

- "I want my job-related risks considered in my care."
- "I'm trying to stay healthy long-term so I can keep working and enjoy my retirement."

If you want more clarity:

- "Can you help me understand your thinking?"
- "When should I check back in?"
- "Based on today's visit, what should we keep an eye on?"

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Discussion tool: Risk factors

How to use this tool

1. Before your visit, review this list and research your family history, especially cancer history – although most cancers are not inherited, some have a strong genetic component.
2. Note anything you want to discuss and be prepared to discuss at your visit.

Important note

This isn't a complete list or a diagnostic tool. Sharing this information helps your doctor understand your baseline and risk over time – even if no action is needed today.

Knowledge of family and genetic risk

- How complete is your knowledge about your family health history? (Good / Partial / Incomplete)

Cancer: General

- First-degree relative with cancer
- Cancer diagnosed before age 50 in family
- Multiple related cancers in family
- Known genetic mutation in family

Cardiovascular disease

- Heart disease, heart attack, or stroke in a parent or sibling
- Happened at a younger age
- High blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes in family

Colon cancer

- Family history of colon cancer
- History of inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's/ulcerative colitis)
- History or family history of colon polyps

Breast cancer

- Family history of breast cancer (men & women)
- Known gene mutation

Prostate cancer (for men)

- First-degree relative with prostate cancer

Bladder cancer

- Occupational exposure as a firefighter
- Exposure to chemical fumes (dyes, rubber, leather, paint)

Lung, oral, and related cancers

- Smoking and tobacco use

Considerations for clinicians caring for firefighters

For clinicians: Caring for firefighters

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How firefighters can use this tool
Share this page with your doctor.

Clinical approaches to supporting firefighters may include:

- Eliciting and validating patient concerns
- Encouraging discussion of symptoms, patterns over time, and occupational exposures
- Clearly explaining both the benefits and risks of screening

High levels of fitness may mask early signs of disease

- Many firefighters maintain strength, endurance, and cardiovascular fitness well into midlife.
- This visible fitness can obscure early disease signals.

Traditional clinical cues may be subtler or delayed

- Symptoms are often attributed to training, shift work, or job-related rather than illness.
- Early warning signs may not fit typical expectations.

Clinical assessment may need a different lens

- Greater attention to changes from an individual's baseline
- Consideration of occupational exposures
- Tracking symptom patterns over time

Firefighter occupational exposures

- Repeated smoke exposure
- Extended exposure to wildland fires
- Chemical or industrial fires
- Significant sun exposure
- Shift work & chronic sleep disruption
- Diesel exhaust: fumes and particulates
- Elevated levels of stress

Firefighter health risks

- Elevated cancer incidence and mortality
- Higher rates of cardiovascular disease
- Increased risk of respiratory conditions
- Mental health concerns including chronic stress, repeated trauma exposure, alcohol and substance use, depression and suicidal ideation

For more information: First Responder Center for Excellence Guides
firstrespondercenter.org/resource-hub/firefighter-physicals/

Sources

1. International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Occupational exposure as a firefighter. IARC Monographs, 2023. https://publications.iarc.who.int/download/Volume132.pdf.
2. Jahnke S, et al. Firefighter cancer incidence and mortality: An updated meta-analysis. Asian Pac J Cancer Prev. 2024. https://doi.org/10.31557/APJCP.2024.25.3.801.