

## How often should I have a pap smear to monitor for human papilloma virus?



Nearly 99 percent of all women will be infected with human papilloma virus (HPV) at some point in their lives. Fortunately, our bodies' immune systems frequently fight off the virus before it causes symptoms or leads to cervical cancer.

The standard used to be to begin pap smears and HPV screening at the onset of sexual activity. However, since young women's bodies fight off the virus very quickly, the American College of Obstetrics & Gynecology has recommended that it be performed every two years beginning at age 21 and, unless an abnormality is detected, every three years after age 30.

Cervical cancer takes years to develop. This schedule makes it possible to catch the disease at a very early stage. Cervical cancer is rare in the U.S. because of the use of pap smears. In underdeveloped countries where pap smears are not routinely performed, cervical cancer is a common cause of mortality in women.

This schedule is a guideline; some clinicians and women still prefer testing every year. You should talk with your physician about what approach is right for you.

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## Does my family's history of kidney stones mean I'm likely to develop them?



Kidney stones do tend to run in families, but family history does not guarantee either developing or avoiding them. Twelve percent of men and five percent of women can expect to experience kidney stones by age 70. Most develop when there is low urine output, which allows substances, such as calcium or oxalate, to form crystals that grow over time.

Dietary factors may contribute to stone formation. A diet high in animal protein, sugar, sodium and oxalate can increase the risk that stones will form. Medical conditions such as Crohn's disease and obesity can further increase the risk.

The most common symptom of a kidney stone is pain on one side of the lower back, which typically occurs as it moves through the urinary tract. If the stone becomes stuck, we have several minimally invasive treatments available at Emerson. They include ureteroscopy – insertion of a tube through the urethra to break up the stone and remove the fragments – and lithotripsy, which uses acoustic shock waves to reduce the stone to sand-like particles that can pass naturally through the urinary tract.

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## Can I prevent my son's asthma attacks so that he can participate in sports?



It's a natural reaction to hold back children who have asthma if exercise, allergies, weather changes or other irritants are "triggers" for asthmatic episodes. However, there are effective preventive treatments that can help parents and kids achieve the goal of having no limitations on their daily activities.

The principle mechanism of asthma is inflammation and swelling of tissues in the lungs caused by exposure to triggers, making it difficult for air to move in and out of the lungs. Most people are familiar with bronchodilator inhalers that counter the tightening of the airways during an asthma attack.

Long-term preventive treatments address the underlying causes of asthma and prevent the attacks from occurring. These include inhaled corticosteroids that deliver medication directly to the airways, thus minimizing side effects. These need to be used on a daily basis, even when your child is feeling well.

My goal is to regularly assess my patients and get them on the least amount of medication necessary for them to lead a normal life without limitations.

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