



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/wellness-exams>

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### **K-State health professional urges Kansans to schedule annual wellness exam**

See the doctor yearly to make sure 'we're as healthy as we can be,' says Johannes

*By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Scheduling a physical with the doctor is an important step in addressing a health concern, but it's not enough.

In fact, a Kansas State University health professional says all Americans need to be active in scheduling and following through with an annual wellness exam.

"A physical usually is to identify a concern, maybe diagnose a disease, or when we think something is not right," said Elaine Johannes, the Kansas Health Foundation's Distinguished Professor of Community Health at Kansas State University. "We go in, we get checked and, thankfully, everything turns out okay."

"A wellness exam," she continued, "should be done annually to make sure that we are as healthy as we can be. The doctor will look at certain indicators – or screenings – to make sure we are working well. If there is a problem, then the hope is that we would catch it early enough to treat it without invasive procedures."

When thinking of wellness checks, Johannes says, "we need to own those...We need to be active in our health."

People of all ages need to be active in scheduling an annual wellness exam, according to Johannes. The [National Institutes of Health](#) urges Americans to visit a health care provider regularly, even if you feel healthy.

The purpose of the visits includes:

- Screen for medical issues.
- Assess the risk for future medical problems.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- Update vaccinations and other preventive care services.
- Help you get to know your provider in case of illness.

NIH also has published guidelines for what a wellness exam should cover for men and women, in three age groups (18-39, 40-64, and over age 65).

“As we get older, [the list of screenings that we should have in our wellness checks](#) gets longer,” Johannes said. “For example, if you’re between the ages of 18-39, no matter if you identify as male or female, those lists may be 10 screenings, head to toe, inside and outside... But as we get older the screening list gets longer; the National Institutes of Health has a list of 15 things that are part of our overall health when we get over the age of 65.”

For older adults, the wellness exam includes screening for diabetes, a colonoscopy, blood pressure, hypertension, cholesterol, osteoporosis, hearing, vision, mental health and more.

Johannes suggests avoiding the temptation to “make excuses” for missing a wellness exam. She provides a list to help all people – and especially older adults – to make sure they get an annual wellness exam:

- Actually schedule the exam and prepare for it by knowing what concerns you may have, and what questions you want to ask the medical professional. Write questions down and make lists of medications to share with your provider.
- Make sure you feel comfortable having your data shared with the physician. Avoid feeling embarrassed about sharing a health concern; physicians are trained professionals who aren’t there to judge you.
- Ask questions and speak out. A national report indicates that physicians spend an average of 18 minutes with patients. “Go into the appointment with the mindset that you and your physician are on the same ‘team,’ and that your active involvement is expected and appreciated,” Johannes said. Be ready with questions so that you make efficient use of that time.
- If there’s not enough time to adequately cover your questions, then follow up with the doctor, nurse or provider’s office professional. Let them know if something new has come up, or ask a question again if you didn’t understand the original answer.
- Advocate for yourself. Don’t assume that someone else will follow up for you. If you don’t understand lab results or other data, contact the doctor’s office to find out what you need to know.

“There are a lot of reasons that people don’t get wellness checks,” Johannes said. “One of those is we believe we don’t have time, or maybe you’re not insured. Geographic distance is also a concern; Kansas is among many states that have shortages in health care providers, including primary care physicians, mental health professionals and dentists.

A lack of providers, Johannes says, “impacts access to health care, especially in rural, frontier areas.”

“There are many barriers, but as a community and as a state, we should be talking about health care. Maybe we could plan for broadband and use tele-health; many screenings can be done through tele-health, or maybe a mobile clinic. There are workarounds to keep us healthy, active and working.”

A longer discussion with Johannes regarding the importance of a yearly wellness exam is available on the weekly radio program, [Sound Living](#), produced by K-State Research and Extension.

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**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story  
National Institutes of Health, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov>

National Library of Medicine (Medline Plus), <https://medlineplus.gov/healthcheckup.html>

Sound Living, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/news/radio-network/sound-living.html>

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