

factsheet

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Medicare Update: Annual Wellness Visit

Under the Affordable Care Act (the health care reform law), Medicare will now pay for an annual wellness visit, which will include the creation of a personalized prevention plan and detection of possible cognitive impairment. This new benefit began on January 1, 2011.

What is an annual wellness visit?

An annual wellness visit is like a check-up or physical exam. Until now, Medicare did not cover annual physicals.

Who is eligible?

Any Medicare beneficiary who:

- Has been receiving Medicare Part B benefits for at least 12 months, and
- Has not had an initial preventive physical examination ("Welcome to Medicare" exam) within the past 12 months.

How often will Medicare pay for an annual wellness visit?

Medicare will pay for an annual wellness visit once every 12 months.

Detection of cognitive impairment is included in the annual wellness visit. What does that mean?

During the exam, the doctor will assess an individual's cognitive function by direct observation, with due consideration of information obtained by way of patient report, concerns raised by family members, friends, caretakers or others.

What else is included in the annual wellness visit?

Prior to or during your appointment, you will be asked by your doctor or health professional to complete some questions about your health. This is called a Health Risk Assessment (HRA). The answers may provide important information to discuss with your health professional during the annual wellness visit. The doctor (or health professional) may check to make sure the heart, lungs, and other body systems are working properly. The doctor will probably ask questions about your daily routine, medical history, memory, as well as take certain routine measurements like height, weight and blood pressure. Find a complete list of what is covered on the back of this sheet.

Are there any deductibles or co-payments for the visit?

No. The Medicare Part B deductible and coinsurance payments do not apply to the annual wellness visit.

Who can perform an annual wellness visit?

An annual wellness visit may be performed by a doctor or other practitioner recognized by Medicare, such as a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, clinical nurse specialist, or other health professional (including a health educator, a registered dietitian or nutrition professional) or a team of such medical professionals who are working under the direct supervision of a physician.

What should you bring to the visit?

You should bring your completed health risk assessment, a complete list of your medications (including vitamins and over-the-counter drugs) or all your medication bottles for the doctor to review. You should also bring a list of your top two to three concerns or questions for the doctor. If you have concerns about your memory or a chronic health condition (such as diabetes, heart disease or depression), you might consider bringing a family member or friend with you to the appointment.

Included in the annual wellness visit:

- Review and update medical and family history
 - Review and update a list of current providers
 - Measure height, weight, body mass index (BMI), blood pressure and other routine measurements
 - Assess for any possible cognitive impairment
 - Review potential risk factors for depression, including current or past experiences with depression or other mood disorders (first annual wellness visit only)
 - Review functional ability and level of safety (first annual wellness visit only)
 - Establish or update a written screening schedule for the individual for the next 5-10 years, based on health status, screening history and age
 - Prepare a list of risk factors and conditions for which interventions are recommended or are underway for the individual, and a list of treatment options and their associated risks and benefits
 - Provide health advice and a referral, as appropriate, to health education or preventive counseling services or programs, designed to reduce risk factors, such as for weight loss, smoking cessation, fall prevention, and nutrition.
 - Review of the responses to the Health Risk Assessment
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