

Women's Health

The importance of annual wellness exams

Cervical cancer was once one of the most common causes of death for U.S. women. However, the introduction of Pap tests in 1943 significantly changed that. By the 1960s, the test was widely used and, according to American Cancer Society, deaths from cervical cancer have dropped by about 70 percent.

The test is now an essential part of women's health care. The guidelines updated in 2012 recommend women have their first Pap test at age 21 and repeat screening every three years until age 29. Those ages 30 through 65 should be screened with Pap and HPV cotesting every five years or every three years with a Pap test alone. The Pap test detects abnormal cells that may develop into cancer if left untreated, while the HPV tests detect HPV infections that can cause abnormalities.

"With any cancer we want to catch it as early as

possible. These tests detect changes that could develop into cervical cancer," said Dominique Speaks, a family nurse practitioner at the Medical Plaza. She added that women with compromised immune systems or who have had an abnormal Pap might require more frequent screenings.

She recommends women get an annual wellness and pelvic exam even when not due for screening.

"The Pap only tests for cervical cancer and there are multiple other things covered in a female wellness exam. We can test for ovarian cancer and STDs, perform breast exams and review how to do them at home, discuss nutrition, and more," she said.

Talk to your primary care provider today about scheduling your female wellness visit.



Speaking up on Behavioral Health

News stories have shown what can happen when society doesn't recognize or pay attention to behavioral health issues until after a tragedy. Yet, one in every five people experience a mental health illness in any given year according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Being aware of behavioral health indicators can help prevent future tragedies and paying attention to our own mental health is a first step.

"There are things we need to do to take care of ourselves and, as a society, we are not very good at that, said Dr. Farrah Hughes, director of Behavioral Health Services. "Stepping back and paying attention to stressors, whether family, work, illness, finances, can greatly improve an individual's life."

Hughes notes that most people underestimate the impact of the stressors they deal with on a daily basis and says we develop a "grin-and-bear-it" mentality. So what can you do to help improve your own mental health? Hughes recommends the first thing to do is listen to your instincts and talk to someone.

"It's important to get perspective; talk to

someone close to you and find out what they have observed, reflect back on what's been going on in your life, and think about the stressors you have been dealing with," Hughes said.

Providers such as psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, clinical social workers, and marriage and family therapists, can help address any concerns. These professionals assess and diagnose mental and behavioral health difficulties and use evidence-based psychotherapeutic methods to treat them. Their help can ward off clinical depression, prevent suicide, combat opioid use disorders, strengthen relationships, and even improve physical health.

"Sometimes, people just need a few sessions to regain their perspective. Sometimes, people need more intensive clinical treatment, and, sometimes, people need that combined with medication to get back on track," said Hughes.



NATIONAL HEPATITIS C TESTING DAY

Symptoms of hepatitis C are not always immediately apparent and millions of people in the U.S don't know they have the viral infection. However, there is good news – there is a cure for hepatitis C, and it begins with testing.

May is Hepatitis Awareness Month and May 19 marks National Hepatitis C Testing Day. Testing for hepatitis C is recommended for many, especially those who:

- were born between 1945 – 1965
- received blood or organs before 1992
- have ever injected drugs
- have liver disease or abnormal liver tests
- have certain conditions: liver disease, HIV, etc.

The first step to the cure is being tested. Take advantage of HopeHealth's free hepatitis C screenings in May. Take control. Get tested.

Testing Events:

HopeHealth Medical Plaza | 9 am – 2 pm | May 18
360 N. Irby St., Florence, SC 29501

Walgreens | 1 – 5 pm | May 21
2191 Whiskey Rd., Aiken, SC 29803

Walgreens | 1 – 5 pm | May 22
1228 Knox Ave., N. Augusta, SC 29841

Walgreens | 1 – 5 pm | May 22
1106 John C. Calhoun Dr., Orangeburg, SC 29115

Walgreens | 1 – 5 pm | May 23
4380 Jefferson Davis Hwy., Beech Island, SC 29842

Walgreens | 1 – 5 pm | May 24
3510 Richland Ave., Aiken, SC 29801

For more information, call (803) 535-2271 or (843) 667-9414.

78 HopeHealth hepatitis C patients were cured in 2017