

[IMAGE]

Five Important Medical Tests You Need to Take

By Julie T. Chen, MD

Going through medical school, we are taught that we should know what's wrong with a patient before we order the labs because the patient's medical history with the medical interview should already tell us our top ideas of what is going on with the patient. But, unfortunately, nowadays, many patients are put through numerous tests because the medical structure is such that physicians are given not enough time to thoroughly discuss the symptoms with a patient. So, when we talk about what is most important in assessing the health of a patient the first and foremost thing would be a thorough medical interview.

Now, what if there just isn't enough time? What are the top five tests that most people should make sure that their doctor is giving them so that you can make sure you are generally healthy?

1. **Comprehensive Metabolic Panel:** This is a blood test that looks at your major electrolytes and minerals as well as your liver and kidney function. Even if you think you are healthy, you should have this done at least once a year to make sure everything is running smoothly. If you have a lot of medical issues and you are on a few medications, this lab should be done every 3-6 months at the very least.
2. **Complete Blood Count:** This test looks at your platelets, red blood cells and your white blood cells. This test should also be done once a year if you are healthy and more often if you are on medications and/or have health issues.
3. **Lipid Panel:** This looks at your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. When you are in your twenties, if you have no medical issues and is not overweight or on medications and you don't have family history of any early strokes or heart disease or cholesterol issues, then you can get this done every 1-3 years. As you get into your thirties and beyond, you should probably start to have this done once a year at your annual physical to make sure that your levels are normal and that you are not at risk for vascular disease.
4. **Fasting glucose level:** Have your doctor check your fasting sugar level once a year if you are otherwise healthy but if you have family history of pre-diabetes or diabetes or if you feel like your blood sugar dips sometimes during the day or night, you should also ask for a lab test that checks your average blood sugar over the last three months called Hemoglobin A1C. This will help to pick up if you might

be having any post-meal sugar issues. If you do, your doctor may want to have you do further blood sugar testing. For those of you with diabetes or pre-diabetes or low sugar dip symptoms, you should be getting your blood sugar checked at the fasting glucose level every 3-6 months along with the Hemoglobin A1C to be extra sure that you are not worsening and is stable.

5. Thyroid Panel including TSH, Free T3 and Free T4: Most of the time, if you are healthy, a screening TSH is enough if you don't have any health complaints. If you are fatigued or gaining/losing weight, losing hair, getting constipation or frequent bowel movements or having palpitations or feeling sluggish, you should have all three thyroid levels checked for a more accurate read of where your thyroid function is since you are having concerning symptoms. Our thyroid gland is very important in keeping us healthy including having an impact on our cholesterol processing so if you have high cholesterol, ask your doctor to check your thyroid as well to make sure that it isn't contributing to your hypercholesterolemia issue.

medical tests - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark In my clinic of integrative medicine, these labs are regularly done for monitoring of my patients' disease state. If you are on any medications or even just vitamins or supplements, you should be having these labs done at least once a year to make sure you are doing well.

While there are of course other labs that are just as important such as vitamin D levels, these top five labs are going to be able to look at parameters of your health that most significantly can impact your overall well-being. So if you are limited to five labs, these would be my choice of the top five. But let's hope you can also get the other labs in as well for your annual physical, because if you can, make sure to also ask for your vitamin D level as well.

But as I had originally mentioned, there's nothing that compares to getting a great medical history from a patient as far as helping physicians who are trying to figure out what's going on with your health. So, don't be shy and make sure that you tell your physician all that's been going on with your health...this way, he or she can be most effective in taking care of you.

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