



## Annual Wellness Exam

Carl Willeford, Jr., MSN, FNP-C, will be glad to conduct an annual wellness exam each year. The cost of annual wellness exams are covered completely by most insurance companies because they help to identify potential issues and conditions before they can become major health concerns. If you have a concern whether your insurance provider will pay for your annual wellness exam, contact them by phone or online.

## What An Annual Wellness Exam Accomplishes

Annual exams usually check your:

**History.** This is your chance to mention any complaints or concerns about your health. Mr. Willeford will also likely quiz you about lifestyle behaviors like smoking, excessive alcohol use, sexual health, diet, and exercise. He will also check on your vaccination status and update your personal and family medical history.

**Vital Signs.** These are some vital signs checked during the physical.

**General Appearance.** Mr. Willeford gathers a large amount of information about you and your health just by watching and talking to you. How is your memory and mental quickness? Does your skin appear healthy? Can you easily stand and walk?

**Heart Exam.** Listening to your heart with a stethoscope, Mr. Willeford might detect an irregular heartbeat, a heart murmur, or other clues to heart disease.

**Lung Exam.** Using a stethoscope, Mr. Willeford listens for crackles, wheezes, or decreased breath sounds. These and other sounds are clues to the presence of heart or lung disease.

**Head and Neck Exam.** Opening up and saying "ah" shows off your throat and tonsils. The quality of your teeth and gums also provides information about your overall health. Ears, nose, sinuses, eyes, lymph nodes, thyroid, and carotid arteries may also be examined.

**Abdominal Exam.** Mr. Willeford can use a range of examination techniques including tapping your abdomen to detect liver size and presence of abdominal fluid, listening for bowel sounds with a stethoscope, and palpating for tenderness.

**Neurological Exam.** Nerves, muscle strength, reflexes, balance, and mental state may be assessed.

**Dermatological Exam.** Skin and nail findings could indicate a dermatological problem or disease somewhere else in the body.

**Extremities Exam.** Mr. Willeford will look for physical and sensory changes. Pulses can be checked in your arms and legs. Examining joints can assess for abnormalities.

## Laboratory Tests

There are no standard laboratory tests during an annual physical. However, Mr. Willeford may order certain tests routinely:

- Complete blood count
- Chemistry panel
- Urinalysis (UA)

A screening lipid panel (cholesterol test) is recommended every 4 to 6 years, according to the American Heart Association. Mr. Willeford might check more frequently if you have risk factors for heart disease. Abnormal cholesterol levels increase the risk for heart attacks and strokes.

If you are overweight or have any risk factors for diabetes, your blood sugar will likely be checked. The American Diabetes Association recommends that all adults, beginning at age 45, should be tested for diabetes -- regardless of weight.

## Physicals Should Emphasize Prevention

The annual physical exam is a great opportunity to refocus your attention on prevention and screening:

- At age 50, it's time to begin regular screening for colorectal cancer. People with immediate family members with colorectal cancer or other risk factors may need to be screened before age 50.
- For some women, age 40 marks the time to begin annual mammogram screening for breast cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that Women ages 40 to 44 should have the choice to start mammograms if they wish to do so. Women age 45 to 54 should get mammograms every year while women 55 and older should switch to mammograms every 2 years, or can continue yearly screening. Women should talk to Mr. Willeford or other health care professional about when to start and how often to get a mammogram. Women should weigh the benefits and risks of screening tests when deciding whether to begin getting mammograms at age 40.

Healthy behaviors work far better than medicine at preventing illness, and don't require a prescription:

- Do 30 minutes of brisk walking or other exercise most days of the week (or about 150 minutes a week). And add in some strength training at least twice a week. Your risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer will fall dramatically.
- Eat a mostly plant-based diet, low in animal fats.
- Above all, don't smoke.