toolkit
Well-Woman Provider Organizations

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Introduction

THANKS TO THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT, most women now have coverage for well-women visits, without additional costs like co-pays and deductibles. But how can they make the most of this benefit? This toolkit is for providers to get the word out about no-cost well-woman visit and includes information on how education and counseling services offered through this benefit can help improve a woman’s health throughout her lifespan.

For more information, go to www.nwlc.org/wellwoman to learn how to #BeAWellWoman. For questions about the well-woman visit, please contact us at prevention@nwlc.org.
Your Guide to Well-Woman Visits

What is a well-woman visit?
A check-up to make sure you are in good health and up-to-date on all of your health screenings. The main goal is to check for health problems and prevent them in the future. You can go to different providers for your well-woman care such as your regular doctor, a nurse practitioner or your local health center.

You and your provider will decide how often you should seek well-woman care.

This is a chance to talk with your provider about:
- Your and your family’s health
- Your questions or concerns
- How to detect and prevent health problems
- Your medicines, including over-the-counter drugs

Does it cost anything?
For many women, these visits are free. The new health care law requires most health plans to cover well-woman visits. Call your insurance company to check.

What will happen during the visit?
Initial paperwork
You may be asked to fill out a questionnaire or checklist. This will update your provider on your health and any emotional or other problems that could affect your health.

Health history review
Your provider will ask about your past health problems and any health problems on your mother’s and father’s side. For example, they might ask if anyone in your family has had heart problems or cancer. They will want to know if you’ve been pregnant, when your last period was, and if you are on any medications. Your provider will also ask about any recent health changes or your health concerns.

Be honest with your provider. This allows your provider to give you the right advice and treatment. If you don’t understand something, ask, “Could you explain that again?”

Discussion about your health
Your provider will ask you many questions about your health—and this is the time to bring up any of your worries or questions. This might include:
- Your health choices, such as your smoking and drinking habits, your food choices, and exercise routines.
- Your personal life, such as your emotions and relationships. Your provider may ask about feeling sad or having trouble doing normal things, so that they can help if you are anxious or depressed. Your provider may ask if you feel safe in your home and relationships, so that they can help if you’ve dealt with violence, abuse, or threats to your safety.
- Providers ask all patients these kinds of questions.
- Changes in your life or worries that might affect your health or wellbeing. For instance, trouble at school or work, a tough relationship, a sick family member, or trouble sleeping.
- Any worries you may have about your health.
- Your reproductive health, such as birth control, pregnancy planning, menstrual history, or menopause questions.

Review your prescriptions
You and your provider will discuss your medicines and renew any prescriptions you need.

Update your health screenings
Your healthcare provider may suggest a list of screenings developed by medical experts. These are tests that can identify health problems, often before you have any signs of being sick. Depending on your age, family history, health choices and any health problems, you and your provider will decide which screenings and services you need. These could include:
- Blood pressure and cholesterol testing
- Alcohol and tobacco screening and counseling
- Depression screening
- Obesity counseling
- Diabetes screening or diet advice
- Talking about genetic testing and medications if you have breast or ovarian cancer in your family
- Pap test for cervical cancer
- HIV testing
- How to prevent sexually transmitted infections
- Counseling on birth control and pregnancy prevention
- Syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia testing
- Mammograms
- Colon cancer screening
- Osteoporosis screening
- Screenings and services for pregnant women

You will likely get some of these services during your visit, and you may get others at another visit or with another provider.

How should I prepare for my well-woman visit?
1. Schedule your appointment: Tell your provider’s office that you are coming in for a well-woman visit (this could also be called a checkup or a physical).
2. Check on any cost: If you’re not sure, call your insurance company to check that your visit is covered.
3. Bring a list of your questions and your medicines. This is so that you don’t forget what you want to talk about.

Physical exam
Your provider will measure your blood pressure, height and weight.
¿Cómo debo prepararme para mi consulta well-woman?

1. Programa tu cita: Diga al consultor de su proveedor (o el proveedor) de que venderá para una consulta.

2. Revise cuál es el condón. Si no está seguro, llame a su compañía de seguros para verificar que su consulta de la condición.

3. Listas de medicamentos, incluyendo la que toma o de la que no se ha tomado por algún tiempo.

4. Prueba del vih/sida y condones.

5. Prueba de embarazo.

Su salud sexual

1. Talla y mantener un peso saludable
2. Haga ejercicio y mantenga la salud y la forma.
3. Evite el consumo de alcohol y drogas.

Su salud de la madre

1. Control de la salud y acondicionamiento físico, tanto en el deseo como en las relaciones sexuales.
2. Control de la salud de la madre, incluyendo la prevención de enfermedades de transmisión sexual.
3. Control del embarazo, la salud del parto y postparto.

Su salud física

1. Asegüese de hacerse los chequeos de salud.
2. Asegüese de hacerse los chequeos de salud.
3. Asegüese de hacerse los chequeos de salud.

¿Estás seguro de que comentar con...?

Descubre más

- Programa tu cita: Diga al consultor de su proveedor (o el proveedor) de que venderá para una consulta.

- Revise cuál es el condón. Si no está seguro, llame a su compañía de seguros para verificar que su consulta de la condición.

- Listas de medicamentos, incluyendo la que toma o de la que no se ha tomado por algún tiempo.

- Prueba del vih/sida y condones.

- Prueba de embarazo.

Grupos de Apoyo:

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
- American Medical Women's Association (AMWA)
- American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM)
- Planned Parenthood Federation of America
- National Coalition of Women's Health Organizations (NCW)
- The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease
- National Women's Law Center
- Women's Law Center of Minnesota

su guía para las consultas (mujer/sana)
¿Qué es una consulta well-woman?
Un chequeo para asegurarse de que tiene buena salud y todos sus cribados de salud están actualizados. El objetivo principal es buscar problemas de salud y prevenirlas en el futuro.
Puede acudir a diferentes proveedores para su atención well-woman, como su médico habitual, una enfermera practicante o su centro de salud local.

Usted y su proveedor decidirán con qué frecuencia debe buscar atención well-woman.

Ésta es una oportunidad para hablar con su proveedor sobre:
- Su salud y la de su familia
- Sus preguntas o inquietudes
- Cómo detectar y prevenir problemas de salud
- Sus medicinas, incluidos los medicamentos sin receta

¿Cuánto cuesta?
Para muchas mujeres, estas consultas son gratis. La nueva ley de cuidado de la salud requiere que la mayoría de los planes de salud cubran las consultas well-woman. Líme a su compañía de seguros para confirmar.

¿Qué pasará durante la consulta?
Papeleo inicial
Se le puede pedir que llene un cuestionario o lista de verificación. Esto pondrá al día a su proveedor sobre su salud y los problemas emocionales o de otro tipo que pudieran afectarla.

Examen físico
Su proveedor medirá su presión arterial, peso y estatura.

Revisión del historial de salud
Su proveedor le preguntará sobre sus últimos problemas de salud y cualquier problema de salud del linfoma de su madre y de su padre. Por ejemplo, puede preguntar si alguien en su familia ha tenido problemas cardíacos o cáncer. Querrá saber si ha estado embarazada, cuándo fue su última menstruación y si toma algún medicamento. Su proveedor también indagará acerca de cambios recientes en la salud o sus preocupaciones de salud.

Comentarios acerca de su salud
Su proveedor le hará muchas preguntas sobre su salud, y éste es el momento para que le consulte cualquiera de sus preocupaciones o preguntas. Esto puede incluir:
- Sus opciones de salud, como serían los hábitos de fumar y beber, sus opciones de comidas y rutinas de ejercicio.
- Su vida personal, como sus emociones y relaciones. Su proveedor puede preguntarle si se siente triste o tiene problemas para hacer las cosas normales, para poder ayudarle en caso de que esté ansiosa o depresiva. Su proveedor puede preguntarle si se siente segura en casa y en las relaciones, para poder ayudarle si ya ha tenido que enfrentarse a violencia, abuso o amenazas a su seguridad. Los proveedores hacen este tipo de preguntas a todos los pacientes.
- Cambios o preocupaciones en su vida que puedan afectar a su salud o bienestar. Por ejemplo, problemas en la escuela o trabajo, una relación difícil, un familiar enfermo o problemas para dormir.
- Cualquier preocupación que tenga sobre su salud.
- Preguntas sobre su salud reproductiva, como control de la natalidad, planificación del embarazo, historia menstrual o menopausia.

Revisión de sus recetas
Usted y su proveedor comentarán sus medicamentos y renovarán cualquier receta que necesita.

Actualice sus cribados médicos
Su médico puede sugerir una lista de cribados desarrollados por expertos médicos. Éstas son pruebas que pueden identificar problemas de salud, a menudo antes de que tenga síntomas de estar enferma. Dependiendo de su edad, antecedentes familiares, opciones de salud y problemas de salud, usted y su proveedor decidirán qué estudios y servicios necesita. Entre ellos se puede incluir:
- Presión sanguínea y pruebas de colesterol
- Estudios y asesoramiento por el uso del alcohol y el tabaco
- Detección de la depresión
- Asesoría por obesidad
- Cribado de diabetes o consejos sobre dieta
- Hablar sobre pruebas genéticas y medicamentos si en su familia ha habido cáncer de mama o de óvaros
- Prueba de Papanicolaou para el cáncer de cuello uterino
- Pruebas de VIH
- Cómo prevenir las infecciones de transmisión sexual
- Asesoría sobre control de la natalidad y prevención de embarazo
- Pruebas de sifilis, gonorrea y clamidia
- Mamografías
- Cribado de cáncer de colon
- Cribado de osteoporosis
- Cribados y servicios para mujeres embarazadas

Es probable que obtenga algunos de estos servicios durante su consulta, y obtendrá otros en otra consulta o con otro proveedor.
Education and Counseling Recommendations: A Critical Component of Well-Woman Visits

Emphasizing disease prevention and health promotion, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act requires that insurers must now cover well-woman visits without cost-sharing. Guidelines from the Department of Health and Human Services clarify that women can receive at least one well-woman visit a year without cost-sharing (more visits must be covered if the health care professional deems them appropriate) and that well-woman visits should provide an opportunity for women to receive age-appropriate recommended preventive services, including prenatal care. National guidelines call for education and counseling as important components of the well woman visit, along with the physical exam, screening tests and immunizations. However, in practice, the opportunity for education, counseling and prevention planning during the well-woman visit is too often neglected or missed. As health care providers, systems and insurers adjust to expanded access under the ACA, the time is right to emphasize education, counseling, and personalized prevention planning during the well woman visit. Under the auspices of a well-woman visit, patients and health care professionals should have the opportunity to develop a personalized prevention plan. The personalized prevention plan takes into account the patient’s age, health history and habits, social situation, personal health concerns and goals as well as the results of screening and risk assessment tools.

The purpose of the well-woman visit is to provide the patient with a chance to:

- Receive care and counseling that is appropriate based on age, cognitive development and life experience
- Review their current health and risks to their health with their health care professional
- Ask any questions they may have about their health or risk factors
- Talk about what they can do to prevent future health problems
- Build a trusting relationship with their health care provider, with an emphasis on confidentiality
- Receive appropriate preventive screenings and immunizations and make sure they know which screenings and immunizations they should receive in the future
- Review their reproductive plan and contraception choices

Key Components of the well woman visit include history taking, age-appropriate chronic disease risk assessment, one-on-one health counseling to improve patient well-being, and age and risk appropriate preventive screenings. For a full list of recommended clinical screenings, visit https://www.healthcare.gov/what-are-my-preventive-care-benefits

The thorough history and risk assessment would include asking patients about:

- Any current health concerns
- Current medications, both prescription and over the counter
- Family history, making sure to ask about both the mother and father’s sides
- Life management, including family, relationships, work, stress, etc.
- Substance use habits, including alcohol and tobacco
- Sexual activity
- Eating habits and physical activity
- Past reproductive health experience and any pregnancy complications
- Any memory problems
In addition, appropriate screening should be utilized as indicated, including screening to assess patients for:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance use disorders
- Interpersonal violence

Taking into account patient concerns and goals and the information gathered from the age-appropriate history, screenings, and risk assessment information, the well woman visit should then include the following important education and counseling components:

**Educate patients about:**
- Healthy eating habits and maintenance of healthy weight
- Exercise and physical activity
- Seat belt use
- Risk factors for certain types of cancer
- Heart health
- Breast health
- Bone health
- Safer sex practices and sexual transmitted disease prevention
- Healthy relationships (partner, family, friends, co-workers, others)
- Preventing or managing chronic diseases
- Resources to improve their health (online, written, community resources, patient groups)
- Medication use
- Fall prevention*

**Counsel patients about:**
- Recommended preventive screenings and immunizations
- Any concerns about patient’s mood, for example, prolonged periods of feeling sad or not enjoying what they usually enjoy, anxiety or irritability that seems out of proportion to events
- What to expect in terms of effects on mood and anxiety at reproductive cycle transitions, including menarche, pregnancy, the postpartum period and peri-menopause
- Body image issues
- Menstrual cycle, peri- or menopause concerns
- Reproductive health or fertility concerns
- Reproductive life planning (contraception appropriate for their life stage, reproductive plans, and risk factors- including risk factors for breast and ovarian cancer and cardiovascular disease)
- Pregnancy planning, including attaining a healthy weight and dealing with any chronic conditions before or while pregnant
- What to expect during menopause, including signs and symptoms and options for addressing symptoms (midlife and older women)*
- Symptoms of cardiovascular disease
- Urinary incontinence*

*Although the well-woman visit recommended by HRSA and covered at no cost-sharing is specifically meant to address the needs of women up to age 64, it is still important for health care providers and patients to understand the unique counseling and education needs of older women. Women 65 and older have access to annual wellness visits through Medicare and could use those visits as an opportunity to discuss these important issues with their health care provider.
Patient Counseling and Education as Important Components of the Well-Woman Visit

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) transforms the U.S. health care system from a system focused on treating the sick to a system focused on keeping people healthy. An integral part of this emphasis on prevention is the requirement that all new health plans cover a defined set of preventive services without cost-sharing. Among the requirements are a set of preventive services specific to women’s health needs, including a Well-Woman Visit. National guidelines call for education and counseling as important components of this visit, along with medical history, physical exam, age appropriate screenings, tests and behavioral risk assessments.\(^\text{1,2}\)

Although there is ample evidence that providing education and counseling during routine visits improves health outcomes and is cost effective, it is not always a routine part of preventive care. The Well-Woman Visit provides an important opportunity to deliver these services.

The Need for Education and Counseling

Regular preventive care that incorporates education and counseling on behavioral changes is particularly important for women in the U.S. who are experiencing increasing mortality rates and have higher rates of chronic disease and mental illness than men. Although women live 4.8 years longer than men on average, women’s mortality rates have increased in over 40% of U.S. counties, compared with an increase in male mortality in only 3.4% of U.S. counties, and maternal mortality rates in the U.S. have nearly doubled since 1990.\(^\text{3}\) Increasing mortality and high rates of chronic disease can, at least in part, be attributed to health behaviors. One study found that, in 2000, half of deaths in the U.S. were due to preventable behaviors and exposures, particularly those related to smoking, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise.\(^\text{4}\) A similar trend appears in current data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) on the ten leading causes of death among women.\(^\text{5}\)

Education and Counseling Improves Health Outcomes

Many of the most common causes of disease, disability and death for women in the United States can be directly attributed to health risk behaviors\(^\text{6,7}\) and behavioral counseling has proven to be effective in modifying these behaviors and, subsequently, reducing the risk of developing certain chronic illnesses. Clinician advice targeted at lifestyle habits is associated with increased efforts by patients to change their behavior.\(^\text{8,9}\) For women, in particular, there is evidence of a “priming effect;” meaning that advice makes patients more attuned to additional information consistent with their provider’s recommendations.\(^\text{10}\) In addition, patient education has been shown to increase the uptake of healthy behaviors, improve medication compliance and assist with disease management.\(^\text{11,12,13}\)

Education and Counseling is Cost Effective

Research has demonstrated that evidence-based clinical preventive services, which include education and counseling, can improve population health and quality of life, often at little cost, and should be a key element of health reform strategies.\(^\text{14,15,16}\) Researchers have estimated that the increased use of twenty clinical preventive services, including immunizations, screenings and counseling, would avert the loss of more than 2 million life-years annually, and could potentially save 3.7 billion dollars.\(^\text{17}\) Most -\text{ if not all -} of the leading factors related to health disability in the US (including dietary risks, tobacco smoking, high body mass index, high blood pressure, high fasting plasma glucose, physical activity and alcohol use\(^\text{18}\)) can be addressed by education and counseling interventions.\(^\text{19}\)

Education and Counseling is Popular With Patients

Qualitative research has shown that patients want more prevention counseling during doctor’s visits. Other studies have confirmed that patients expect their providers
to educate them on key behaviors, including diet, exercise, and substance abuse. Women consider clinical settings to be appropriate for discussions of sexual health, intimate partner violence, and other sensitive topics, and expect their provider to initiate these conversations.

**But Many Women are not Receiving Education and Counseling Services**

Recent data shows that 81.5% of OBGYNs and 73.5% of Primary Care Providers were not counseling their patients on obesity, exercise, diet, or tobacco use. Women report similarly low rates of education and counseling during their doctors’ visits. For example, only 31% of women report receiving counseling on alcohol and drug use and only 41% report that they discussed their mental health with their provider in the past year.

**The Well-Woman Visit Provides an Opportunity to Emphasize Education and Counseling as Key Components of Women’s Preventive Care**

Implementation of the Well-Woman provision under the ACA provides a unique opportunity to ensure that education and counseling become the norm during preventive visits. The Well-Woman Visit:

- Increases patient awareness of education and counseling as an essential component of preventive care;
- Provides increased opportunity for providers to tailor education and counseling services to the risk factors and preventive care women need across the lifespan within the framework of personalized medicine;
- Allows patients and providers the time and space to develop and build relationships creating an environment where education and counseling can succeed; and
- Removes the financial barrier many women face when they do not have the resources to seek out education and counseling services when cost sharing is required.

As implementation of the ACA continues, it is essential that education and counseling services figure prominently as an essential component of the Well-Woman Visit. With an increased emphasis on education and counseling, women will have the opportunity to consistently engage in well visits with their providers that identify and address risk factors early on. Preventing complex, chronic disease, and improving the overall health and wellness of women across the lifespan will become routine Well-Woman Visit care.

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Sample Op-Ed:

It may be the Affordable Care Act’s best kept secret—but it shouldn’t be.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has brought health care to those who have never before been covered. Now that open enrollment has started up again, women need to know they can see their health care providers—at no cost to them—annually for a well-woman visit. The visits cover everything from a physical exam to screening tests and immunizations. This is critical preventive care that could catch some of the most serious health issues women face, including breast cancer, colon cancer and heart disease. The well-woman visit could mark the beginning of a turning point in the overall health of a significant number of American women.

We just have to be sure that women and health care providers know about it and use the visit properly. For example, education and counseling about disease prevention and health maintenance should be a standard part of the visit. Without these services, the exam could be a lost opportunity.

To maximize this critical benefit, women should be prepared to ask—and providers should be prepared to counsel—about cancer risk factors; heart, breast and bone health; healthy relationships; sexually transmitted infections; mood; reproductive health planning, including fertility and menopause; family history and eating habits. While this is by no means an exhaustive list, it is a starting point.

The no-cost well-woman visit can be a turning point. It could make a big difference in the lives of many women. But first women need to know about it and health care professionals need to know what they should provide during the visit. It’s time to start spreading the word.

The purpose of the well-woman visit is to review the patient’s health, discuss appropriate chronic disease risk assessment. That means that the provider needs to know what the visit is expected to include, and women need to prepare questions to ask.
Sample Letter

to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Women can now see their health care providers—at no cost to them—for a routine well-woman visit, thanks to the Affordable Care Act. Yet too few women and providers know about this important benefit. These visits cover everything from a physical exam to screening tests and immunizations, and are essential to women’s overall well-being. These are also a chance for women to receive education and counseling about disease prevention and health maintenance, and an opportunity to develop a personalized prevention plan. The well-woman visit could be a turning point for women’s health—if women and health care providers know about it. Now that open enrollment has started up again, it’s time to spread the word.
Sample Newsletter Text:

Have you talked to your patients about no-cost well-woman visits?

The Affordable Care Act has shifted the focus on treating the sick to a system focused on keeping people healthy. As part of this effort, the health care law has provided new preventive health services at no addition costs, like co-pays and deductibles. One of the most important of these benefits is the well-woman visit – which helps to ensure that women are healthy throughout their lifespan.

What should providers be prepared to counsel their patients on during this visit? Patients may ask questions about cancer risk factors; heart, breast and bone health; healthy relationships; sexually transmitted infections; mood; reproductive health planning, including fertility and menopause; family history and eating habits – to just start.

The National Women’s Law Center and the Mary Horrigan Connors Center for Women’s Heath has a new consumer brochure that tells you more about the well-woman visit and a factsheet that outlines the education and counseling that patients could receive. In addition, policy papers about how to better integrate education and counseling into primary care is available. Find materials on the well-woman visit at [www.nwlc.org/wellwoman](http://www.nwlc.org/wellwoman).
Sample Tweets:

- Have you talked to your patients about no-cost well-woman visits? Help your patients #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- What should providers be prepared to counsel their patients on during a well-woman visit? #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- Did you know you could get a no-cost check-up thanks to #ObamaCare? Learn how to #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- Do you know how to #BeAWellWoman? Learn more about no-cost well-women visits. www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- What questions should you be asking your provider during your well-woman visit? #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- Want to #BeAWellWoman? It just got easier with no-cost well-woman visits. Find out more:
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- Well-woman visits (aka check-ups) are available w/o co-pays! It’s never been easier to #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- What kind of ed & counseling can you get w/ your no-cost well-woman visit (aka checkup)? #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- From birth control counseling to cancer screenings–learn the questions you should be asking to #BeAWellWoman
  www.nwlc.org/wellwoman
- W/ open enrollment, it’s your chance to #GetCovered and BeAWellWoman! All plans at HealthCare.Gov include no-cost well-woman visits.
- #GetCovered at HealthCare.Gov and get a plan with no-cost well-woman visits today! BeAWellWoman
Sample

Facebook Graphics:

Do you know how to #BeAWellWoman? Thanks to the health care law, well-woman visits are available without additional costs, like co-pays and deductibles. Learn more about what questions you should be asking your provider at your next check-up. www.nwlc.org/wellwoman

Have you talked to your patients about no-cost well-woman visits? Make sure your patients know what type of education and counseling should be available at this check-up and help your patients #BeAWellWoman

www.nwlc.org/wellwoman