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](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.