

Pap smears have long been a part of an annual exam but that is changing. Studies have shown that with HPV testing and a low risk history you only need to have one every 5 years if over the age of 30 and no change in sexual partners. Pap smears are not recommended in patients under 21 years of age. Pap smears are recommended every three years between the ages of 21 and 30. Of course, Pap smears would have to be done more frequently if there are abnormalities. It is important to come in yearly for physical exams, including a breast exam, mainly focusing on preventive care and treatment of existing conditions. I have adapted these recommendations as most insurance companies are following these guidelines as well.

Another new recommendation is to omit the rectal exam on all patients of any age who don't have any symptoms. This is because studies have not shown any benefit to the patient by performing rectal exams. Just like pelvic exams there are potential harms such as anxiety, over treatment and procedural harms. We also know some patients do not come in for physicals because they do not want the rectal exam. We give patients a choice of whether or not they want a rectal exam. New guidelines as of 2018 do recommend starting colorectal cancer screening at age 45 now.

These changes are fairly significant and we would like to give you a choice as to what you would prefer. We would be glad to discuss the new recommendations with you.

Carolyn W. Quist, DO