

## GoodHealth

# Blood pressure, cancer, cholesterol. The simple tests you should have in the next 12 months... whatever your age

IT'S THAT time of year when many of us make specific resolutions, such as quitting smoking. But monitoring our general well-being is just as vital. This can be done with routine checks, usually available on the NHS. Here, ANGELA EPSTEIN rounds up the tests you should be having for a healthy 2008.

If you have any worrying symptoms, you should always see your GP more frequently than the time scale or age bracket suggested here. For each age range, add the tests suggested for the age group before your own.

### AGE: 18+

#### TESTICLES

**REASON:** To spot early warning signs of testicular cancer, the most common form of cancer in men aged 15 to 45.

**FREQUENCY:** At least once a month.

**TEST:** Check yourself after a warm shower when the skin is relaxed. Look out for lumps, an increase in firmness or an unusual difference between one testicle and the other, in which case see your GP.

**MONEY NO OBJECT:** The MRI screening clinic Prescan (0845 257 0012) offers ultrasound scanning to assess the health of the male pelvis. A single scan costs £440.

#### SMEAR TEST

**REASON:** Detects early abnormalities which could lead to cancer of the cervix, especially important as the disease is symptomless at first. Women aged 25 to 64 are invited for a free cervical screening test at their GP's surgery. However, women who are sexually active should have a smear test before 25 to spot human papilloma virus (HPV) — a cause of this cancer.

**FREQUENCY:** Every three to five years.

**TEST:** Cells are swiped from the surface of the cervix and sent away for analysis.



# YOUR 2008

#### BONE

**REASON:** To detect the bone-thinning condition osteoporosis, which tends to be symptomless until a sufferer experiences a fracture.

**FREQUENCY:** On the advice of your GP. Risk factors are the prolonged use of steroids, smoking, early menopause, excessive drinking, a family history of hip fractures or a body mass index of less than 19.

**TEST:** A DEXA (dual energy X-ray absorptiometry) scan that measures the density and calcium content of bones.

**MONEY NO OBJECT:** DEXAs are not routinely offered by the NHS, unless necessary. They cost around £100 privately.

#### BREASTS

**REASON:** Early detection of breast cancer. The NHS provides free mammograms for women aged 50 and over (47 from May). But those with a family history of breast cancer under 40 are entitled to earlier screening. Symptoms include a change in the size or shape of the breast, a lump and blood-stained discharge from the nipple.

**FREQUENCY:** Every three years.

**TEST:** An X-ray of the breasts — ask for a referral from your GP.

**MONEY NO OBJECT:** Digital infrared thermal imaging (DITI), a non-invasive technique that claims to pick up potentially malignant tumours five to eight years before they are detected by mammography. No exposure to radiation, unlike mammograms. Initial costs £225.

#### PROSTATE

**REASON:** To spot benign prostate enlargement or prostate cancer.

**FREQUENCY:** To be decided by your GP.