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At Scottsdale Medical Imaging, women can receive a bone density scan on the Dual-Energy X-ray Absorptiometry, or DEXA scanner. A DEXA technologist demonstrates the scan to Mammography Coordinator Bridget Stone.



Women's **health screenings** through the ages

From breast exams to bone density, from cholesterol checks to colonoscopies

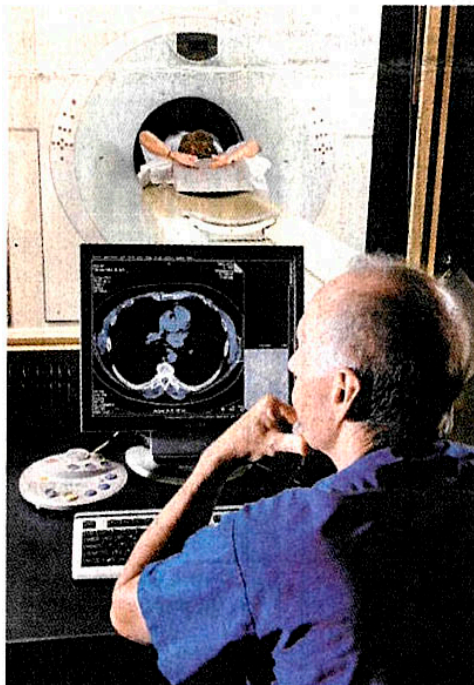
BY PAULA HUBBS COHEN

Knowing when to be screened for what can be a bit confusing, so let's take a quick walk across the continuum of a woman's life, listing when experts advise that some screening tests should take place. Please note this is not a full list of screening tests, and age ranges will vary depending on personal risk factors. Always check with your own health-care provider for what schedule best suits you personally.

Teens/20s

Daniel P. Aspery, M.D., Vice President of Health Services, Medical Director, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona, advises that women should have their cholesterol checked at least every five years starting at about age 20. "High cholesterol can lead to atherosclerosis which can lead to heart attacks, strokes and peripheral vascular disease," he said. "Lifestyle changes are the mainstays for addressing your risks, however, medication is often needed."

Other tests appropriate for this age group include blood pressure checks, screening for depression and full-body checks for skin cancer.



Run by CT technologist Rod Denzie, a woman receives a Coronary Artery Calcium Score study at Scottsdale Medical Imaging.

COVER: SCREENINGS

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30s & 40s

According to Dr. Sunil Ram, a cardiac imaging radiologist at Scottsdale Medical Imaging (SMIL), approximately eight times as many women die of heart attacks compared to breast cancer, so screening for heart disease is critically important and can begin at age 40.

Dr. Ram explained that coronary artery calcium score (CACS) CT exams identify people who have begun developing disease before the onset of symptoms. "People with risk factors for coronary artery disease should consider having a CACS."

A woman should have her first Pap test and pelvic exam three years after first sexual intercourse or age 21, whichever is earliest. After that, every one to three years.

But the decade of the 40s is not all about a woman's heart. Per the American College of Radiology, it's also the time when women should have baseline mammograms. "In women with family history of breast cancer, screening may be

advised earlier than age 40," said Dr. Monali Gupta, women's imaging radiologist at SMIL. Indeed, depending on personal risk factors, experts advise some women to have their baseline 'mammo' in their mid- to late-30s.

50s

During a woman's 50s, several tests are recommended, including screening for colorectal cancer.

"Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in women after breast and lung cancer," said Dr. Mark Kuo, a SMIL cross-sectional body imaging radiologist. "Colon cancer is unique in that it is a preventable disease through proper screening. Currently, the medical community recommends colorectal screening begin at age 50."

Traditional colonoscopies are a long-heralded method for checking for colon issues, but Dr. Kuo explains that CT colonography (sometimes referred to as virtual colonography) is another screening option. "Patients have air placed into the colon and subsequently, CT images are obtained," he said. "In the majority of patients, no significant

abnormalities are found and the screening is complete."

This decade is also when menopause usually occurs, so Dr. Aspery advises that women and their doctors should discuss the risks and benefits of hormonal replacement therapy, or HRT.

60s

"At 65, women should start getting screened for osteoporosis," said Dr. Aspery.

Dr. Gupta agrees, stating that premenopausal women who are under 65 who have risk factors for osteoporosis should also consider being tested to assess their bone health. "Risk factors include a history of fractures, cigarette smoking, thyroid disease or alcohol intake greater than two drinks per day."

70s+

According to American Cancer Society guidelines, if a woman is 70 years of age or older, has had three normal Pap tests in a row and has had no abnormal Pap test results in the last ten years, she may stop getting Pap tests. However, as in all cases, this is something that should be discussed between a woman and her health-care provider.