

Direct-To-Consumer Health Screenings



What Are “Direct-To-Consumer” Health Screenings?

Many companies offer direct-to-consumer (DTC) health screenings. These screenings might be offered at your local hospital or church for a fee. They offer tests for things like heart disease, stroke risk, and more. Life Line, Health-fair, and similar companies who offer these screenings are for-profit and make money from these tests. Many health professionals think that the tests are not needed, and might even harm you.



Sometimes I See “Preventive Health Screenings” Offered. Should I Get One?

- DTC screening companies often have events at your local church or community center, advertising “preventive health screenings.” These companies might tell you that the tests are simple and could save your life.
- What they don’t tell you is that these tests can be harmful and not useful.
- Some health screenings are helpful, like the ones done by your trusted health professional. These could include a blood pressure or cholesterol check.



What Do Health Experts Say About DTC Screenings?

For most healthy people, the tests that are offered by screening companies are not recommended by the US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). The USPSTF is a government organization that makes health recommendations for patients based on science and research. The USPSTF does not recommend these tests for most healthy people. The USPSTF guidelines are clear about what screening tests you should and shouldn’t have. This is what they say about who should have some of the tests that are offered by screening companies:

- Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm: testing needed only for men ages 65 to 75 years old who have ever smoked.
- Carotid Artery Stenosis: recommends against screening in adults.
- Coronary Heart Disease: recommends against screening in adults with low risk and no symptoms.
- Osteoporosis: testing only needed for women 65 years and older or women who have risk for bone fracture.

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How Are These Tests Harmful?

- These tests may show a health “problem” that isn’t really a problem at all. These false positive results may lead to follow-up tests that show the screening test was wrong. The follow-up tests, like CT scans and MRIs, can cause allergic reactions, bleeding, exposure to radiation, and more.
- These screenings can also cost a lot of money. They are not covered by insurance because they are not done by a doctor. This means you have to pay out-of-pocket for them. The money you spend on the screenings could be spent on things that are better for your health like eating healthy food or going to an exercise class.
- The results that you get can cause a lot of worry for no reason. These results should be looked at by a trusted health professional who can understand them. Many “positive” results might not mean what you think they mean.



Why Does the Brochure Say Many Lives Have Been Saved by These Tests?

- The stories that you read about in the brochures only talk about health problems found in a small number of people. It would be hard to say that everyone would benefit from these tests with such little information.
- When doctors give you advice, they usually give it based on data and evidence from trusted research done with a much larger number of people.
- So far, there hasn’t been research to show that the screening tests saved the lives of people with no symptoms. Also, the screening companies don’t tell you stories about people that had problems as a result of these tests.



Questions For My Doctor

- What screening tests do I need to stay healthy?
- Am I at risk for any health problems now or in the future?
- I went to a health screening and got a positive result. What does it mean?
- How can I stay healthy in the long run?

Notes:
