

Take advantage of Medicare’s free annual wellness checkup



Senior Beat
Carol Higgins Taylor

If you have Medicare, you are probably aware that you are entitled to a free annual wellness visit with your healthcare provider. Not to be confused with an annual physical, the wellness visit is a chance for you to really connect with your provider. You’ll discuss your current health and together will develop an individualized and comprehensive plan for staying or getting healthy. When you enrolled in Medicare, you had the opportunity for Welcome to Medicare visit, which is a one-time

thing. The wellness visit is similar in nature but you are allowed to have it annually. I have been told recently that some seniors are not taking advantage of this visit, instead using their annual physical as their wellness visit. This is a mistake. The wellness visit is an opportunity to truly connect with the health care provider and gives you the time you deserve to discuss your health. There are only upsides to this appointment, so if you have not scheduled a wellness visit, consider doing so. The visit can take about an hour – unheard of in this day and age. Again, it’s free to Medicare beneficiaries. During the visit, your healthcare provider will give you a questionnaire, called a Health Risk Assessment. The answers to these questions can

paint a clearer picture for both you and the provider and will be the basis for the personalized health plan. The wellness visit will probably also include: --Reviewing your medical and family history. --Developing or updating a list of current providers and prescriptions. --Having height, weight, blood pressure, body mass index and other routine measurements documented. --Screening for cognitive impairment, including diseases such as Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia. --Personalized health advice and a list of risk factors and treatment options to suit your current state of health. --Reviewing your functional ability and level of safety, including screening

for hearing impairments, your risk of falling and risk factors for depression. --A checklist for preventive services you should have along with details about screenings and shots. Medicare covers many preventive care services, and this checklist will depend on your health status and what services you are eligible to receive. While this wellness visit itself is free, in certain circumstances you may incur costs if, for example, your provider runs tests separate from those in the parameters of the wellness visit or if you receive additional care during or following the visit. Just keep this in mind and talk with your provider. As we age, having a close

relationship with our health care providers is critical. The better the provider knows you and your physical and mental condition, the better he or she can treat you. Understanding your lifestyle can also help the provider develop a prevention plan so you can stay healthy. This is the time to be honest. Many people skirt the truth when asked questions that, conceivably, could provoke judgment on the part of the provider. For example, how much do you drink? What is your daily diet like? (I hate that one and have been known to skirt my way around the sweets category.) The truth will set you free, as they say. Full disclosure is the key to a real connection with the provider and will only serve to better your overall health.

If you are extremely uncomfortable, bordering on fearful, about being completely honest with your provider regarding your habits, consider finding a new health care professional. To achieve your best health, you and your provider need to be a team. Learn more at www.medicare.gov. Another resource that provides comprehensive and easy to understand information is www.medicarights.org. For Medicare counseling, give Eastern Area Agency on Aging a call at 1-800-432-7812. The State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) is a terrific resource. Carol Higgins Taylor is an advocate for seniors and owns Bryant Street Public Relations in Bangor. Email her at seniorbeat@gmail.com

Check for foot ulcers in those with diabetes

BY KATHY FRODAHL RN, WCC, DWC AND OMS
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

According to the American Podiatric Medical Association, diabetic foot ulcers occur in approximately 15 percent of people with diabetes. These wounds most commonly occur on the ball of the foot or the bottom of the great toe.

These ulcers are the leading cause of non-traumatic lower extremity amputations. In fact, a staggering 14-24 percent of patients with a foot ulcer will have some form of lower extremity amputation. Limb loss statistics tell us a diabetic patient that has had a lower extremity amputation has a 55% chance of requiring another amputation of the other limb within 2-3 years.

The most common risk factors for developing a diabetic foot ulcer are; diabetic neuropathy, foot structural deformities and Peripheral Artery Disease (PAD). Neuropathy can cause loss of feeling in your foot and because of this you can injure your foot and not know it. You could have a foreign object in the bottom of your shoe such as a tack or stone and walk on it all day without knowing it. The pressure of walking on it could cause a sore or foot ulcer. You might not notice a foot injury until the skin breaks down and becomes infected.

Peripheral Artery Disease is a common circulatory problem. Fatty deposits build up in the arteries causing narrowing of the arteries, thus reducing blood flow to the limbs and other areas of the body. Poor blood flow can change the shape of your feet or toes and can cause foot deformities. These deformities can lead to focal areas of high pressure. When a patient with diabetes has loss of sensation along with pressure to that area, a foot ulcer is likely to develop. Decreased blood flow also makes it more difficult to heal a foot ulcer once it has occurred.

Smoking also affects small blood vessels and can cause decreased blood flow to the feet, also causing wound healing delay. Looking at these statistics help us to see the importance of caring for our feet. Some important tips are:

Inspect your feet every day. Look for reddened or open areas such as cuts, scrapes or blisters. Notify your physician about sores that do not heal in 1-2 days, corns, calluses or bunions, or any itching or cracks between your toes. If you cannot see the bottoms of your feet, use a mirror.

You should ask your physician to examine your feet at least annually.

Wash your feet daily with mild soap and warm water, being careful to dry well, especially between your toes. Use lotion with lanolin to soften your feet, but don’t put lotion between your toes.

Wear soft closed toed shoes that fit your feet well. Medicare Part B will cover custom made shoes for diabetic patients if the certifying physician identifies that the patient is at risk for diabetic foot ulcer.

Be sure to wear socks without seams that fit your feet well. If you can’t see or reach your toes, see your podiatrist to have your nails trimmed regularly. Keep your blood sugar under control by eating a healthy diet and getting the proper amount of exercise. Check with your physician about a diet and exercise plan that is right for you. Check your blood sugar as often as you are directed.

City of Bangor plans meetings for residents

City officials will host four community meetings this fall to answer questions from the public, identify community needs and share information about local government. The meetings stem from attempts made by Councilor Pauline Civiello to form a new standing

committee for the purpose of strengthening and empowering local neighborhoods. The proposal was scaled back to four meetings after councilors expressed concern a new standing committee would be perceived as adding bureaucracy to the city’s government. Civiello said she made the proposal because she felt neighborhoods were

“put on the back burner” while the city pursued other projects. “Things are not being maintained the way they should be,” said Civiello. According to City Manager Cathy Conlow, the meetings will give residents a chance to hear directly from city staff about city services. Representatives from all the different city departments will be on hand to

address concerns and answer questions. Residents are encouraged to submit questions in advance via the city’s website at bangormaine.gov/askbangor. “It’s an awesome opportunity for us to listen to them -- what’s concerning them and what should we be doing to address those problems,” Conlow said. The meetings are scheduled from 7 to 9

p.m. at the following dates and in these locations: -- Sept. 10: William S. Cohen School. Garland Street (auditorium) -- Sept. 24: James F. Doughty School, Fifth Street (auditorium) -- Oct. 8: Mary Snow School, Broadway (gymnasium) -- Oct. 22: Downeast School, Moosehead Boulevard (gymnasium)

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