

Preventive health screening



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Training document “Promoting the health of women with a migrant background”

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Preventive health screening

Preventive health screening was introduced in Austria in 1974, and underwent fundamental reform in 2005. It is aimed at all individuals who are resident in Austria, including those who are not insured.

What is preventive health screening (health check)?

The health check is a free service provided by the Austrian social security fund. The patient receives important information about how to improve and maintain their health. A personal risk profile is compiled. Key topics are nutrition, exercise, alcohol consumption and smoking. An individual consultation with the doctor is intended to explain how to lead a healthy lifestyle and provide support in making changes.

Preventive health screening focuses on the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders (e.g. diabetes), cancer prevention and prevention of diseases that affect older people (age-related hearing and sight impairment).

Screening allows chronic diseases to be identified at an early stage, and appropriate measures to be implemented to minimise possible risk factors. Early detection can improve the chances of recovery.

Who is eligible for preventive health screening?

Preventive health screening offers everyone over the age of 18 who is resident in Austria a comprehensive annual series of check-ups.

Who carries out the preventive health screening?

The preventive health screening is provided by:

- ◆ Doctors in private practices (GPs)
- ◆ Social security funded doctors and
- ◆ Health insurance funded health centres.

Any additional examinations that may be required are carried out by specialists in internal medicine, pulmonary medicine and radiology. The gynaecological examination is carried out by specialists in gynaecology and obstetrics.

What are the aims of preventive health screening?

Preventive health screening pursues two aims:

- ♦ the avoidance of health risk factors and
- ♦ the early detection of diseases.

The specific aims of preventive health screening are:

- ♦ Reduction in obesity
- ♦ Healthy diet
- ♦ Regular exercise
- ♦ Prevent high blood pressure
- ♦ Prevention of disorders of the lipid metabolism
- ♦ Prevention of diabetes mellitus

The figures clearly show that prevention works. When preventive health screening was introduced in Austria in 1974, women lived on average to the age of 75 and men to an average age of 67. Today, women live for seven and men for eight years longer.

How much does preventive health screening cost?

Free preventive health screening is available once a year from the social security health providers.

Uninsured individuals are also entitled to screening. For them, the cost is paid by the locally responsible regional office of the Austrian National Health Insurance.

What do I need to take along to the screening?

- ♦ You will need your e-card as proof of entitlement.
- ♦ It is also advisable to take any old findings from previous examinations with you.
- ♦ Doctor's note from your previous preventive health screening, if one was issued. The doctor can then compare the new readings with the old ones and see if there are any changes.
- ♦ List of all the medications you take regularly.

You must not have eaten before the preventive health screening (no breakfast!) as a blood sample will also be taken.

Note: If you have no insurance, bring an e-card alternative (*e-card Ersatzbeleg*) to the surgery with you for your health check. You can get this with a registration form from a social security customer service centre. Ask for an e-card alternative (*e-card Ersatzbeleg*) with the note "Preventive health screen for uninsured persons".

You can find further information at:

[Preventive health screening - Styria \(gesundheitskasse.at\)](https://gesundheitskasse.at)

[Informational material and general contract \(sozialversicherung.at\)](https://sozialversicherung.at)

Risk factors

Our health and well-being are affected by a wide range of factors. We can influence some of these ourselves, but not others. Obesity, smoking and exercise are examples of behaviours we can control ourselves. Age and genetic conditions on the other hand cannot be influenced. Nevertheless, these examples can have an impact on health. In medicine, we therefore talk about risk factors.

What is a risk factor?

A risk factor in medicine refers to certain conditions that increase the probability that a disease will occur.

Risk factors we can influence are e.g.:

- ✦ Unhealthy diet
- ✦ Obesity
- ✦ Lack of exercise
- ✦ High blood pressure
- ✦ Smoking
- ✦ Excessive alcohol consumption
- ✦ Stress

But environmental conditions also count, such as air pollution or increased exposure to sunlight, for example.

Risk factors that we cannot influence ourselves are e.g.:

- ✦ Age
- ✦ Gender
- ✦ Genetic dispositions (hereditary predisposition)

Risk factors do not automatically mean that you will develop a disease. It is just that the probability is higher.

The preventive health screening programme

Diseases can occur at any stage in life. The treatment and recovery options are often better if a disease is detected at an early stage. Preventive health screening is a key aspect of preventive medicine.

The screening programme covers:

♦ Early detection of cardiovascular diseases:

A key focus of preventive health screening is on cardiovascular diseases. In Austria, cardiovascular diseases are the main cause of death in women over the age of 65 and men over the age of 45.

Early detection of a disease involves correlating lifestyle habits (e.g. smoking or alcohol consumption) with physical and internal values such as weight and blood pressure.

♦ Early detection of metabolic diseases:

Important processes in the human body are upset by metabolic diseases. The most common and best-known disease is diabetes mellitus. According to estimates, some 600,000 people suffer from diabetes in Austria. However, around 20% have no idea they have the disease.

To assess your risk of diabetes, you will be asked about cases of diabetes in your family, and your blood sugar will be measured.

♦ Early detection of common cancers:

The likelihood of developing cancer depends on many factors. If several risk factors interact, the risk of developing cancer increases significantly.

According to findings by Statistics Austria, around 42,000 people in Austria develop cancer each year. Men are slightly more affected than women. After cardiovascular diseases, malignant cancer tumours are the second most common cause of death in both genders. The most common types of cancer among women are breast cancer, bowel cancer and lung cancer. In men, it is prostate cancer, lung cancer and bowel cancer.

The early detection of cancer enables treatments that are easier to tolerate than treatments for advanced stages of cancer.

♦ Addiction prevention:

A separate focus area is addiction prevention. This involves recording the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and medications as well as offering support and help in coming off these substances.

You can find further information at:

<https://www.vivid.at/>

<https://www.gesundheit.gv.at/service/broschueren/sucht-infomaterial>

♦ **Prevention of gum disease:**

Bacterial gingivitis (periodontitis) is considered the biggest risk factor for tooth loss after the age of 30. 70% of tooth losses are caused by chronic periodontitis. Disease progression is pain-free and so often goes unnoticed.

The aim of preventive health screening is to identify the risk of periodontitis and slow down or halt disease progression through appropriate preventive measures.

♦ **Prevention of age-related diseases:**

Increased attention is paid to the hearing and sight of people over the age of 65. Almost one third of people over the age of 65 have a hearing disorder or impaired vision. Many people fail to recognise that their hearing is deteriorating in good time. With appropriate treatment, quality of life can be considerably improved.

Preventive health screening is broken down into basic and additional screenings:

What do the basic screenings involve?

- ♦ Your medical history will be recorded: You will complete a questionnaire about your own previous illnesses, hereditary predisposition, exercise, alcohol consumption, etc.
- ♦ Physical examination: Inspection of the skin, listening to the heart and lungs, examination of the spine, etc.
- ♦ Certain body measurements will be recorded: Height, weight, hip circumference, Body Mass Index, blood pressure.
- ♦ Blood test to determine blood sugar and blood lipid readings.
- ♦ Urine test
- ♦ Gynaecological examination: Cell smear (cancer smear) from the cervix for early detection of cervical cancer.
- ♦ Examination for periodontitis: If there are indications of gum disease, the patient is referred to the dentist.
- ♦ Final consultation (review of health condition and lifestyle advice).

Why is a regular gynaecological examination important?

The gynaecological examination is intended to prevent and diagnose diseases. It includes a consultation and a vaginal examination.

From the age of 18, an annual cell smear (PAP smear) should be taken from the cervix as part of the gynaecological examination for the early detection of cervical cancer. The examination is carried out by the gynaecologist at a separate appointment. The tissue is examined in the laboratory for cells suspected of being cancerous.

Cervical cancer occurs most commonly between the ages of 25 and 55. The PAP smear for the early detection of cervical cancer is the most successful cancer tests there is. With this test, cancer is usually discovered at an early stage and progression can be halted completely. Over the past ten years alone, the incidence of cervical cancer has fallen by 38%.

From the age of 20, the gynaecological examination includes a breast palpation examination. Women should also check (palpate) their own breasts once a month, preferably when they have finished menstruating. You will get to know your own breasts this way, and be able to spot any changes early on.

You can find further information at:

[Gynaecological examination - Gynaecology | Health portal](#)

[Focus on early detection of cervical cancer - Lower Austria \(gesundheitskasse.at\)](#)

What do human papillomaviruses cause in the cervix?

Human papillomaviruses (HPV) can lead to abnormal cell growth in humans and cause precancerous lesions, cancer and genital warts. Infections with cancer-causing HPV are responsible for over 70% of all cases of malignant cervical cancer.

Human papillomaviruses are transmitted through direct mucosal contact, for example during sexual contact, or in rare cases from mother to child during birth. Condoms do not provide reliable protection against infection. The HPV vaccination reduces the risk of genital warts and cervical cancer by up to 90%.

You can find further information at:

[2020 HPV WEB.pdf \(krebshilfe.net\)](#)

What do the additional screenings involve?

On the one hand, you will be referred for additional screenings if the basic screenings indicate possible disease. On the other hand, special screenings are recommended once you reach a certain age:

- ✦ Mammography
- ✦ Colonoscopy
- ✦ Urological examination
- ✦ Hearing and sight test

When is a mammography recommended?

Your radiologist will offer you a mammography as part of the **Austrian Breast Cancer Early Detection Programme**. A mammography is a special X-ray examination of the breast. It can also detect small, non-palpable early stages of breast cancer. The programme also targets healthy asymptomatic women.



Women aged between 45 and 69 receive a personal invitation for a mammography examination in the post every two years. The e-card for the examination is automatically activated. A doctor's referral is no longer necessary in addition to this invitation or activation.

Women aged between 40 and 44 and between 70 and 74 can request an invitation using the free telephone service line 0800 500 181.

You can find further information at: <https://www.frueh-erkennen.at/>

When is a colonoscopy recommended?

A colonoscopy is recommended from the age of 50. Anyone with no pain is advised to have the examination every ten years. If there are abnormalities, an earlier check-up may be recommended. Patients with chronic inflammatory bowel diseases or a family history of bowel cancer should have their first colonoscopy before the age of 50.

The colonoscopy can be performed by a specialist in internal medicine or surgery, or in hospital in the departments of internal medicine/gastroenterology or surgery. A referral is required.

You can find further information at: [Colonoscopy | Health portal](#)

When is a urological examination recommended?

Men from the age of 45 should regularly undergo a preventive health screening for prostate cancer. Men at an increased risk (if their brother(s) and/or father have prostate cancer) should undergo preventive health screening for prostate cancer from the age of 40 at the latest. They are at twice the risk of

developing prostate cancer in their lifetime.

When is a hearing and sight test recommended?

For people over the age of 65, preventive health screening places increased attention on hearing and sight. A specialist examination will be requested if abnormalities are detected.

Overview of early detection of cancer and recommended examinations

Early cancer detection for women/recommended examinations:

- ♦ Cancer smear (PAP): annually from the age of 18; HPV test minimum every three years from the age of 30;
- ♦ Palpation of the breasts by the doctor: annually from the age of 20; self-examination of the breasts monthly from the age of 20;
- ♦ Mammography: every two years from the age of 45;
- ♦ Occult test (stool test): annually from the age of 40;
- ♦ Colonoscopy: every seven to ten years from the age of 50;
- ♦ Skin self-examination: twice a year before and after the summer.

Early cancer detection for men/recommended examinations:

- ♦ Self-examination of the testicles: monthly from the age of 20;
- ♦ Prostate examination by a doctor: regularly from the age of 45;
- ♦ Urine test: regularly from the age of 40;
- ♦ Occult test (stool test): annually from the age of 40;
- ♦ Colonoscopy: every seven to ten years from the age of 50;
- ♦ Skin self-examination: twice a year before and after the summer.

Youth screening

The screening programme for young people is not just about the early detection of diseases, it also provides education and support to help make lifestyle changes that are good for the health. The focus is on providing counselling in conversation. Key topics are:

- ✦ Exercise,
- ✦ Diet,
- ✦ Smoking,
- ✦ Alcohol consumption and
- ✦ Risky sexual behaviour.

To take into account the reality of young people's lives, the website www.feel-ok.at also provides a platform on which a variety of health-related topics are presented in a language suitable for young people.

Where do these screenings take place?

The youth screenings can take place at vocational colleges, outpatient clinics at the respective social insurance providers, and partly in companies.

Who is eligible for youth screening?

Young people in work aged between 15 and 18 and who have mandatory insurance in place are eligible for an annual youth screening.

Promoting good health

The aim of promoting good health is to bring physical, mental and social well-being within everyone's reach. Promoting good health is intended to enable people to gain greater control over their health and empower them to improve their health.

What we eat and drink, how often we exercise and how frequently we are exposed to stress have a major influence on our health. People should therefore be encouraged to make positive changes to their lifestyle.

Promoting a health-conscious lifestyle through the right diet and sufficient exercise not only improves overall well-being, it also helps to cut economic costs.

Where does promoting good health happen?

You can adopt healthy habits not just at home, but also when you're at work, at school, when you're out in your neighbourhood and in leisure facilities.

How does diet affect health?

We eat too much fat and salt and not enough fruit and vegetables. We don't get enough of certain vitamins, minerals and fibres as a result.

Nutrition is critical in both the development of diseases and in maintaining health. For example, a close correlation has been shown between diet and obesity, type II diabetes mellitus, tooth decay and certain types of cancer. A balanced diet can prevent disease, as well as general weakness, fatigue and problems concentrating. For example, eating more fruit and vegetables reduces the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes.

Less than half the population of Styria can be described as normal weight (46.7% are normal weight, 36% are overweight, 15.3% are obese and 2.0% are underweight).

Excess weight and obesity, and the diseases they trigger, not only impair individual quality of life, they also present a massive challenge for the health system. Working life is also affected because diet-related diseases can be responsible for sick leave and early retirement.

You can find recipes for a healthy diet at:

<https://www.gesundheitsfonds-steiermark.at/gesunde-ernaehrung/rezepte-fuer-gesunde-ernaehrung/>

You can find further information at:

<https://www.gesundheitsfonds-steiermark.at/gesunde-ernaehrung/>

<https://www.gesundheitsfonds-steiermark.at/gesunde-ernaehrung/die-steirische-ernaehrungspyramide/>

How does exercise affect our health?

Exercise improves physical and mental health, enhances quality of life and fosters social relationships. The human body needs regular physical activity to function optimally and stay healthy. Lack of exercise can lead to obesity, musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases and even depression.

A person should walk 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day to have a positive impact on their health. But there is an increasing tendency to sit for long periods – we sit for breakfast, in the car and then at a desk all day. Sitting for hours is a risk factor for many diseases.

How can I build exercise into my daily life?

Unfortunately, exercise often gets pushed to the bottom of our daily routine. This is why promoting good health focuses especially on getting moving during the day.

It's easy to build exercise into your daily habits. Small changes to your day soon have a positive on the body, like taking the stairs instead of using the lift, standing while you're talking on the phone or cycling to work. The key lies in frequent, short periods of exercise spread throughout the day. You don't need to play an endurance sport for hours.

Regular physical activity can have a positive impact after even a short time, for example improved muscular strength and lipid metabolism. To reduce the risk of disease and stay healthy for as long as possible, however, you need to exercise regularly, in the right amount, throughout life.

For further tips, go to:

[Exercise Folder \(fgoe.org\)](https://fgoe.org)

How much exercise is recommended?

Regular exercise has a positive impact on health at any age. In Austria, the recommendation for adults aged between 18 and 65 is at least 150 minutes (2½ hours) per week.

People aged 65 and over should exercise in diverse ways. Physical training that promotes both muscle strength, balance, mobility and endurance is important to reduce the increased risk of falls with age.

How does smoking affect health?

Tobacco consumption presents the biggest risk to human health globally. Smoking doesn't just cause cancer and a large number of other chronic diseases among smokers themselves, it is also a huge health risk for non-smokers.

Smoking can damage every organ in the body. Harmful substances get into every part of the body through the bloodstream. The respiratory tract and cardiovascular system are particularly affected. Smokers suffer significantly more strokes and heart attacks, and are more likely to contract all diseases of the respiratory tract and respiratory organs. Tobacco consumption can cause almost every type of cancer. And not just lung cancer.

Tobacco consumption is an avoidable risk factor, however. Stopping smoking will soon lead to health improvements in existing conditions or help them never to occur in the first place.

Where can I get support?

Do you want to quit smoking? You don't need to do it alone - professional help is available:

- ♦ Quitline (Rauchfrei Telefon) 0800/ 810 013
Free support for callers.
- ♦ Stop smoking in 6 weeks
This 'Stop smoking in 6 weeks' programme is provided throughout Styria by the Österreichische Gesundheitskasse (Austrian National Health Fund/ÖGK).
- ♦ Rauchfrei app
The Quitline offers a free app (Rauchfrei) to support you in stopping smoking for good.

You can find further information at: [Help with stopping - VIVID - specialist addiction prevention centre](#)

How does alcohol affect health?

Alcohol is drunk on many occasions in Austria. It serves as a stimulant, it quenches thirst, it's drunk with food, and it's associated with fun and relaxing. Alcohol affects our mood, our behaviour, our perceptions, our concentration and our capacity to think and react. Alcohol has a high addictive potential and places a burden on all the organs, especially the brain, heart and liver. People who regularly drink large amounts of alcohol for years are particularly at risk of developing an addiction.

How much alcohol is OK?

If you enjoy the occasional glass of wine or beer, there's no cause for concern:

Tolerable alcohol consumption levels:

- ♦ for men per day = ½ litre of beer or ¼ litre of wine
- ♦ for women per day = 1 glass (0.3 litre) of beer or around ¼ litre of wine

Alcohol consumption levels that are harmful to health:

- ♦ for men per day = 1.5 litres of beer
- ♦ for women per day = 1 litre of beer

The recommendation for a healthy adult is not to exceed the tolerable alcohol consumption levels and to have **minimum two alcohol-free days** per week. For various reasons, older people are more sensitive to alcohol, and so should consume smaller amounts.

Where can I get support if I think I'm drinking too much?

If you or someone around you drinks too much alcohol, don't hesitate to seek professional help and talk about it: with someone you trust, a doctor or with one of the many support facilities and advice centres in Styria.

You can find the contact details at:

[Advice centres in Styria – Less alcohol – More from life \(mehr-vom-leben.jetzt\)](#)

How does stress affect health?

Stress is a natural part of our lives – but too much of it can make us ill. Increasing demands in our professional lives and double workloads often lead to ongoing situations of stress that can be harmful to our health.

In stressful situations, the human organism releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These activate the body and prepare it for a fight or flight response. This affects every part of the body. In stressful situations, bronchial tubes dilate to take in more oxygen. Breathing becomes rapid and shallow as a result. The heart also beats faster and harder, causing the blood pressure to rise and the blood vessels to constrict. More blood is supplied to the muscles and they tense up more. Overall, the body adjusts to a higher energy consumption and releases more sugar into the blood. Conversely, digestion slows down and sensitivity to pain decreases. The entire body is thus ready for action.

Physical consequences of stress may include e.g.:

- ◆ Tinnitus and hearing loss
- ◆ Cardiovascular problems such as high blood pressure or cardiac arrhythmia, for example
- ◆ Gastrointestinal problems, such as chronic digestive problems (constipation or diarrhoea)
- ◆ Diabetes
- ◆ Weakened immune system
- ◆ Tense muscles
- ◆ Increase in skin diseases

Tips for dealing with stress

Without sufficient rest, stress can affect your overall health, permanently impairing your body. The physical stresses should not be underestimated either. A good work/life balance is therefore more than just a trend, it's the way to a more relaxed life. Regular rest combats stress and restores better balance. So you should always try to counteract your stressful times. But how?

Here are a few tips for dealing with stress:

- ◆ Exercise sets your body free – and it's best if you do it outside
- ◆ Targeted relaxation, e.g. autogenic training or yoga
- ◆ Balanced diet
- ◆ Get enough sleep
- ◆ Set priorities
- ◆ Make time for hobbies, family and friends

Conclusion

Our lifestyle habits bring with them a wide variety of risk factors. It is important to be conscious of your own lifestyle habits, and change or modify them if necessary.

Changing old habits is not easy, and the process takes time. Break your goals down into small steps so that you can achieve them in the foreseeable future. It's best to start with one or two achievable changes that you can build on.

Use the preventive health screening to get lots of health tips and find out more about how you can improve your health.

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