

BRUNCH



JUST DO IT

Prevention is better than cure. That's why you must make a date with some doctors at least once a year

by Tavishi Paitandy Rastogi

JOURNALIST DIVYA Mehta had an unbearable toothache that took her to the dentist one day. Like many others, she had avoided visiting the dentist for years because she was scared of them and because she subscribed to that common view that once you start seeing a dentist, you have to keep going back for something or the other.

"The doctor had one look at my tooth and said I needed root canal treatment. I was aghast," she says. "He told me my tooth had reached an advanced stage of decay and the only way out was a root canal. If I had come to him earlier, I could have avoided this," says Divya.

It's strange actually. We ensure we service our cars regularly. Not only that, if we hear something rattling at the back of the car one day, we go to a mechanic to check it out immediately. But we neglect our bodies blatantly.

Like cars, we all need some basic check ups every few months to see if everything is all right. That enables us to spot problems and fix them before they develop into bigger problems.

These check ups don't have to be all that often. If you are an active and a generally fit person, you need a check up only once a year. That surely isn't much to ask for.

So what are the basic checkups you should get done? How often? And what happens if you don't? We list five medical practitioners you should set a date with at least once a year.

FOR A majority of us, an eye check up means going to the optician to check our vision. What we don't realise is that people with high power (-6 and above) need to visit an eye specialist, not just an optician, at least once a year or when they notice certain changes in their vision. "People with high power must be very cautious about symptomatic problems like distortions, flashes, colourful fragments and hazy lines in their vision. They should get regular check ups to rule out glaucoma, retinal detachment and cataract," says Dr Anita Sethi, consultant ophthalmologist, Artemis Health Institute.

Dr Sethi says the first visit to the eye specialist should be made just before a child starts school: "That is when vision starts to form properly and it is only at this stage when we can diagnose problems like lazy eye in children, which can lead to complete lack of vision in the affected eye if left uncorrected." Thereafter, one should visit an eye specialist at least once a year till the age of 40 and every six months after that, she says. **Emergencies:** Red eye, drooping vision and the presence of a foreign body in the eye must get immediate attention.

GOING BY the book, you must get a thorough check up of your teeth and gums every six months.

"Caries or decay of the tooth due to demineralisation, cavities, plaque, bleeding gums and bad breath are problems that are fairly common and can happen at all ages. They need to be checked promptly and a six monthly investigation of the teeth is essential to avoid them," says Dr Rajeev Aggarwal.

Divya ignored her teeth for too long which is why when she finally went to a dentist, what would have required a routine filling of a cavity now required the more serious and more uncomfortable root canal.

That's what most of us do, says Dr Aggarwal.

"Apart from brushing our teeth in the morning, we generally ignore oral care. That is why it is only when the tooth completely decays and the pain starts that we visit a dentist. But by then, it is usually too late," says Dr Aggarwal.

Emergency: Toothache, bleeding gums and pain in the jaws need immediate attention. Also, if your tooth breaks suddenly, it can be restored completely if you get medical attention within 45 minutes. Till then, preserve the tooth in milk or in the injured person's saliva.

WE ALL NEED BASIC CHECK UPS REGULARLY TO SEE IF EVERYTHING IS ALL RIGHT

BRUNCH

GENERAL PHYSICIAN



THE GENERAL physician (GP) is not hard to find since we tend to consult him / her in all matters. A GP usually refers you to a specialist if he / she feels it is necessary. That's why it's a good idea to visit one regularly, especially if you are above the age of 40.

"You must get a regular health check up, especially if you are above the age of 40. Tests like ECG, lipid profile to check the level of cholesterol, haemoglobin, sugar, urine culture are important after one crosses 40," says Dr Verinder Anand, consultant, internal medicine, Moolchand Medicity.

So does that mean that those below 40 don't need to see a doctor every few months?

"Yes, but only if you lead a relatively healthy lifestyle," says Dr Anand. "A healthy lifestyle means you don't have any addictions like cigarettes, you are physically active, have decent eating habits and more or less take care of your health."

Emergency: Chest pain, blood in cough or urine, fever or breathlessness are symptoms that need attention immediately since they can be pointers to more serious ailments.

ORTHOPAEDIC SURGEON



BECAUSE OF the deskbound lifestyles we lead, many of us frequently suffer nagging aches and pains in the back, neck or shoulder that we conveniently ignore in the hope that the pain will go away on its own. It usually does, only to ap-

pear with a vengeance the next time around. Though it is not necessary to consult an orthopaedic surgeon regularly, you must whenever you have a nagging pain to rule out the possibility of a serious injury.

"Fifty per cent of growing kids and young adults suffer from back pain. Though the most common form is muscular pain, one must get a thorough check up done to rule out spinal injury or disc displacement," says Dr Ravi K Khetrpal, senior consultant, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre.

Pain in the neck and shoulders should be checked for spondylitis. "This could be muscular pain too but if it comes associated with tingling and numbness and if you have a family history of arthritis, it could be a cervical problem," says Dr Khetrpal. **Emergency:** Severe back pain, pain that shoots down the leg, lack of bowel control could be the result of a displaced disc and needs urgent medical attention.

GYNAECOLOGIST



ALL WOMEN above the age of 20 should visit a gynaecologist at least once in two years. This is essential because women undergo frequent hormonal changes.

"Regular monitoring is effective as it spots the symptoms and prevents many diseases," says Dr Anuradha Kapoor, consultant gynaecologist, Max Health Care.

Women above the age of 20 must go for a pap smear test, an ultrasound of the pelvic region and breast examination at least once in two years. "All this is vital for their health, especially if they are sexually active," says Dr Kapoor.

While the pap smear rules out infections in sexually active women, the ultrasound detects problems like ovarian cysts. "After the age of 40, women should also undergo mammography, blood sugar, lipid profile, haemoglobin and thyroid tests at least once a month. After 60, a bone density test is also essential," says Kapoor.

Emergency: Heavy or irregular bleeding, missed periods, post coital pain or bleeding, facial hair, acne and excessive discharge demand immediate attention as they can be the result of a hormonal imbalance.

tavishi.rastogi@hindustantimes.com