



# Medical Professionals

## Make Taking Care Of **You** A New Year's Resolution



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The New Year is upon us. If you are like most women I know, you have shopped for Christmas, wrapped all the gifts, food shopped for your menu and basically run yourself ragged taking care of everyone else but **YOU**.

Many women make New Year's resolutions to diet, exercise or loose weight. All are good ideas. They focus on you. Another important way you can take care of yourself is getting an annual gynecologic exam.

The real issue at hand is routine gynecologic health screening. What does this mean? *It means having an annual gynecologic exam.*

Women should have a gynecologic exam every year starting at age twenty one. The components of such an exam include a comprehensive personal and family medical history, comprehensive physical exam including clinical breast exam and pelvic exam. This allows the physician to screen for general health problems in addition to gynecologic issues. Pap testing

can be recommended on a variety of different schedules depending on the clinical setting. Currently, at Advanced Care Ob Gyn, we continue to offer annual pap testing for most women starting at the age of twenty-one. The Pap test is the principal screening test for cervical cancer. The advances in pap testing over the last several years have increased detection rates for cervical abnormalities such as cervical cancer. Earlier diagnosis has improved patient outcomes and quality of life for many women.

Breast health should be addressed at the annual gynecologic visit. Patient and family breast and ovarian cancer history should be obtained. This may alert your provider to an increased risk for you. If you are deemed at risk, BRCA testing is indicated. This is a simple blood test for a genetic mutation which may increase your risk for breast cancer and/ or ovarian cancer. If this test is positive,

your risk for breast cancer may be increased up to 70 % and ovarian cancer risk may be increased up to 40 %. Currently, I screen patients based on family (both maternal and paternal) and personal history. This is done on the initial annual visit and updated each subsequent year. And each year, we at Advanced Care re-evaluate your personal breast and ovarian cancer risk. If blood testing is indicated, we have a lab draw station at our practices for your convenience. This allows detailed follow-up, counseling and surgical referrals if needed. At this same visit we instruct patients on a self breast exam (SBE). If patients are given proper instruction in the SBE, it is a valuable tool for women. We always recommend

monthly self breast exams. Also recommended is a base line mammogram between 35- 39 years old. Mammograms should be performed annually starting at age 40.

Pelvic health screening covers a lot of territory. A bladder history is obtained to screen for frequency or urgency of urination, overactive bladder and

incontinence. Sexual health is addressed. We attempt to identify problems with sex drive, painful sex as well as other personal concerns. This is a touchy subject for most women to discuss. Our view is that sexual health is as important as the rest of you. We approach this issue in a sensitive, nonjudgmental manner. Most women will respond to this in a positive fashion. To women with sexual health

concerns, it is usually a great relief when the doctor initiates the discussion. If there are concerns, please be open and honest with your health care provider so they can help you. A personal and family history for endometrial and colon cancer is also obtained. If a patient is identified

as at risk, Colaris testing can be performed. This is a blood test that identifies the patients that carry the gene for colon and endometrial cancer. Again, this can conveniently be done in our offices. STD testing is recommended for those 25 and younger who are sexually active to diagnose and treat asymptomatic infections.

Additional blood testing recommended are Vitamin D and HIV. In recent studies, low levels of Vitamin D are associated with increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer.

This is also a good time to review nutrition, exercise, birth control, fertility options with patients. Women have additional nutritional requirements for calcium, folic acid, Vitamin D. In general recommended requirements are calcium 500 mg/day, Vitamin D 800 units/day, folic acid 1 mg/day. Birth control and fertility options should be discussed with your health care provider.

I encourage and challenge all women to empower themselves, take charge of your health and well-being. Seek annual gynecologic care and screening with a caring, competent medical professional. Of course it will take time out of your day to do this but you are worth every minute you spend in your Ob Gyn's office.

**It is the New Year, I look ahead to a happy and healthy 2010. Now is the time to schedule that appointment you have been putting off. I look forward to seeing you in the New Year.**

*Salvatore A. Carfagno, Jr., DO received his medical training, internship and residency at The Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. He is currently Board Certified by the American College of Osteopathic in Obstetrics and Gynecology. He is presently on staff at Atlanticare Regional Medical Center and Shore Memorial Hospital and averages 300 deliveries per year, this in addition to an extensive gynecological surgical caseload.*

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