

What is the difference between a “physical” and an office visit?



Most of the time, patients are seen at office visits. An “office visit” is an appointment time to discuss new or existing problems. The questions and exam will focus on the problems discussed. This may include prescribing medications, ordering additional tests like lab or x-ray, in-office procedures like an EKG, referrals to specialists, or discussing other treatment options.

A “physical” or “preventive health exam” is a thorough review of your general well-being. The clinician will review your medical problems, perform a complete physical examination and make recommendations concerning your health. This may include general recommendations regarding diet and exercise, age appropriate immunizations and cancer screening exams such as a pap test, prostate exam or breast exam and screening lab work. Ongoing chronic medical problems and medication refills can be addressed as long as the condition is stable and does not require a significant change in treatment or additional tests.

Occasionally, you may be seen for both a physical and an office visit on the same day. This means that you satisfy the requirements for both types of visits during one appointment. For example, if you scheduled a physical but also were discussing an additional problem that requires evaluation and treatment – either for a significant new symptom or a notable change in an existing condition requiring a new treatment plan. In this situation, you would be billed for both a physical and an office visit during the same appointment.

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