

Gen Z: Plugged In, But Not to Their Health

Over half of Gen Z adults said they are less likely to schedule a cancer screening if it requires calling a health care provider's office.

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Getting screened for cancer—even when you feel fine—can lead to better health outcomes. But if there's one age group that could use a reminder, it's Gen Z. That's according to the Prevent Cancer Foundation's 2024 Early Detection Survey (1), which sheds light on how this generation's phone anxiety may be partially to blame. More than half of Gen Z adults (55%) reported they are less likely to schedule an appointment if it requires calling a health care provider's office (2).

While those in their 20s are only eligible for a few routine cancer screenings, it's clear they are falling behind—more than half (53%) of Gen Z adults said they didn't have a routine medical appointment or routine cancer screening in the last year compared to millennials (47%), Gen X (40%) and baby boomers (27%). While phone anxiety is a barrier to receiving cancer screenings and health care among Gen Z, it's not the only challenge this generation faces when it comes to staying on top of their health:

- Among Gen Z women, only 35% of respondents reported being up to date on their cervical cancer screening, and more than quarter (29%) of those who are behind say they didn't know they needed to be screened.
- Only 39% of Gen Z respondents are up to date on their oral cancer exam. The generation's top reason for being behind on this screening is not being able to afford the cost (32%).
- Less than a third (27%) of Gen Z respondents have received a skin cancer check with their health care provider in the last year. Gen Z cited not knowing they needed to be screened as their top reason for being behind on annual skin cancer checks.

Unfortunately, these results are in tandem with the increase of young-onset cancer cases being diagnosed in adults between the ages of 18 and 49. A study published in BMJ Oncology showed new cancer cases among younger adults have increased by roughly 79% between 1990 and 2019.

According to the American Cancer Society, melanoma—the deadliest form of skin cancer—is one of the most common cancers in people younger than age 30. And oral cancer diagnoses are increasing in younger adults due to [human papillomavirus](#) (HPV), a virus that can be prevented with the HPV vaccine beginning at age 9. The reason for this sharp increase is not yet fully understood; however, we know routine screenings can allow for earlier detection of cancer, when there are more treatment options and better chances of survival.

Gen Z has a unique set of circumstances at play that can affect their health care journeys. For many in this age group, being away at college or moving out of a parent's or guardian's home may require finding a new health care provider. Some are navigating the health care system by themselves for the first time—since the Affordable Care Act requires health insurance plans and issuers that offer dependent child coverage to extend coverage until age 26, many in their late 20s are just now procuring their own insurance coverage.

“It's safe to say we've all been there before. Picking up the phone and making that appointment—especially for the first time—can feel intimidating,” said Jody Hoyos, CEO of the Prevent Cancer Foundation. “But scheduling that appointment is a crucial first step. The earlier we reach people and share the importance of checking their health, the better their chances are for a healthy future.”

The Early Detection Survey indicated a strong preference for digital solutions in health care scheduling. Nearly half of Gen Z adults expressed that the option to schedule appointments online or via an app would significantly encourage them to book routine doctor's appointments or cancer screenings.

To further combat the rise in early-onset cancer cases, Gen Z should take notice that Early Detection = Better Outcomes. It's within your control to advocate for your health and talk to a health care provider about the routine cancer screenings you need. The Prevent Cancer Foundation is empowering people to educate themselves and have these conversations by providing resources for patients, such as info on the [screenings you need at every age](#), listings for [free and low-cost cancer screenings](#) and a [tool to create your own personalized screening plan](#).

People in their 20s who are of average risk should receive the following routine screenings:

Clinical breast exam: If you were assigned female at birth, talk with your health care provider at least once every three years for risk assessment, risk reduction counseling and a clinical breast exam. (Source: National Comprehensive Cancer Network)

Cervical cancer screening: If you have a cervix, begin cervical cancer screening at age 21. In your 20s, this means a Pap test every three years, with additional screening options available in your 30s. (Source: U.S. Preventive Services Task Force)

Oral cancer check: Visit your dentist every six months and ask for an oral cancer exam. (Source: American Dental Association)

Skin cancer check: Get an annual skin check and perform monthly self-exams. If you notice any changes to moles or areas that look concerning, bring it to the attention of your health care provider. (Source: American Cancer Society)

Testicular cancer check: If you have testicles, ask your health care provider to examine them during your routine physical and learn about self-exams. Performing a self-exam can help you get to know what is normal for you. If you notice a change, see your health care provider right away. (Source: American Cancer Society)

HPV vaccination: Young people ages 9-12 should get vaccinated against HPV. This applies to all young people regardless of whether or not they have a cervix. If you were not fully vaccinated when younger, you can "catch up" and get vaccinated against HPV up to age 26. HPV is linked to at least six types of cancer. (Source: American Cancer Society)

Talk with your health care provider about any personal or family history of cancer or other diseases to determine if you should begin cancer screenings at an earlier age or be tested more frequently. Having one or more family members with a history of certain cancers or other diseases may increase your cancer risk.

You can find information and resources on all cancer types studied in the 2024 Early Detection Survey—including information on relevant screenings—at preventcancer.org.

(1) The cancer screenings studied in this survey were for breast cancer, cervical cancer, colorectal cancer, lung cancer, oral cancer, prostate cancer, skin cancer and testicular cancer.

(2) In this survey, Gen Z is defined as adults ages 21-27, millennials as adults ages 28-43, Generation X as adults ages 45-59 and baby boomers as adults ages 60-78.

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<http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/gen-z-plugged-health>