

General Physical and Diagnostic Examinations: What to Expect and Patient Rights During Exam

Welcome to the UT Student Health Center. We are happy to serve you and meet your healthcare needs.

We understand that most patients feel uncomfortable when they go to see a doctor or another healthcare provider. We also understand that many of our patients may be doing so for the first time on their own and may not know what to expect. To facilitate a better exchange of information, we want you to feel safe, comfortable and confident during your examination. Therefore, we would like for you to know what to expect during your time with one of our doctors or other healthcare providers.

Below, we have outlined many of the more common components of a general physical or diagnostic examination. As opposed to a problem-focused physical or diagnostic examination, a general physical or diagnostic examination involves evaluation of the entire body. Not all of these will be performed at each visit. It really depends on the purpose of your visit.

What to Expect

Vital Signs. These are some of the vital signs that may be checked at the time of your exam.

Blood pressure. Less than 120 over less than 80 is a normal blood pressure. Blood pressure is assessed by placing a wide band around usually your upper arm. The band will become tight, and then slowly release pressure. Readings can be taken electronically, but sometimes by using a stethoscope and listening to the artery in your arm.

Heart rate. Values between 60 and 100 are considered normal. However, many healthy people, especially young adults, often have heart rates slower than 60. The heart rate or pulse may be taken electronically with your blood pressure, or felt by the examiner on the artery of your wrist, elbow, neck, or, if necessary, the groin.

Respiration rate. From 12 to 16 breaths per minute is normal for a healthy adult. The respiratory rate is obtained by observing the number of breaths in a set period of time. Assessing your respiratory rate may sometimes require the examiner to place a hand on your chest wall to detect movement of your breathing muscles.

Temperature. 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit is the average body temperature, but resting temperatures can be slightly higher or lower. A temperature is obtained with a thermometer, usually placed under the tongue. Some models use a skin sensor, and can be obtained by checking your forehead. In certain circumstances, a thermometer may be inserted rectally to obtain the body temperature, as this can be more accurate.

History. The history is usually the first part of your exam. This is your chance to mention any complaints or concerns about your health. Your healthcare provider will also likely obtain information regarding lifestyle behaviors like smoking, alcohol use, sexual health and practices, diet, and exercise. Your vaccination status and personal and family medical history may also be obtained.

General Appearance. Your healthcare provider gathers a large amount of information about you and your health just by watching and talking to you. How is your memory and mental quickness? Does your skin appear healthy? Can you easily stand and walk? The examiner may visually and/or physically touch/feel your bare skin to assess things like overall hydration, skin tone, and skin color.

Heart Exam. Listening to your heart with a stethoscope, a healthcare provider can detect an irregular heartbeat, a heart murmur, or other clues to heart disease. Palpating the chest wall for your heart impulse and to detect chest wall abnormalities may be performed. This may require the examiner to place the stethoscope on your bare skin, on the front, sides, and back of your chest. The examiner may also have to touch/feel your bare skin to assess for abnormalities.

Lung Exam. Using a stethoscope, a healthcare provider listens for crackles, wheezes, or decreased breath sounds. These and other sounds are clues to the presence of heart or lung disease. This may require the examiner to place a stethoscope on your bare skin, on the front, sides, and back of your chest. The examiner may also have to touch/feel your bare skin to assess for abnormalities.

Head and Neck Exam. Opening up and saying "ah" shows off your throat and tonsils. The quality of your teeth and gums also provides information about your overall health. Ears, nose, sinuses, eyes, lymph nodes, thyroid, and carotid arteries may also be examined. The examiner may shine a light in your eyes, ears, nose and mouth. The examiner may have to touch/feel your face, head, neck, or areas within your mouth or nose to assess for any abnormalities.

Abdominal Exam. Your healthcare provider can use a range of examination techniques including tapping your abdomen to detect liver size and presence of abdominal fluid, listening for bowel sounds with a stethoscope, and palpating for tenderness or enlargement of abdominal organs. This may result in the examiner having to touch/feel the bare skin at the front, sides, and back of your abdominal area with their hands and a stethoscope.

Neurological Exam. Nerves, muscle strength, reflexes, balance, and mental state may be assessed with a multitude of in office activities. Some of these assessment techniques may require the examiner to touch/feel your bare skin, push, pull, or tap your extremities with a reflex hammer.

Dermatological Exam. Skin and nail findings could indicate a dermatological problem or disease somewhere else in the body. This may require the examiner to visually inspect and touch/feel your bare skin.

Extremities Exam. Your healthcare provider will look for physical and sensory changes. Palpation for pulses can be checked in your arms and legs. Examining joints and muscles can assess for other abnormalities. These exams often require the examiner to visually inspect and touch/feel your bare skin.

Laboratory and Radiology Tests.

The healthcare provider may need laboratory tests or x-rays to aid in your diagnosis and treatment plans. Labs or x-rays will be obtained only with patient consent and verbalized understanding of their associated costs and obligations of financial responsibility.

There are no standard laboratory or radiographic tests during an examination. However, some of the more common tests obtained may include:

Complete blood count	Chemistry panel
Urinalysis (UA)	Rapid Strep test
Mono test	Rapid Flu test
Tests for sexually transmitted infections	Chest X-ray
Extremity X-rays	Electrocardiogram (EKG)

Most laboratory examinations utilize blood specimens that require a brief needle stick to obtain. Other laboratory exams may require the collection of urine, feces, or sputum. Additionally, lab specimens may be collected by using a special swab in the nose, mouth, or other body cavities.

Electrocardiograms, or EKGs, are obtained by placing several wired leads on your chest wall. This exam will be conducted in a private room by one of our professional staff. This exam will require clothing to be removed from the waist up.

Radiological examinations, or X-rays, will be conducted by one of our professional staff. These examinations may require you to wear an examination gown, and the staff member may have to touch your body to position you correctly. Also, procedures will be taken to minimize your exposure to x-rays.

Patient Rights

We also want to remind you that you have rights as a patient. The following are some of your rights as it relates to your physical or diagnostic examination:

- To be treated with respect, consideration, and dignity.
- To have the nature and necessity of your examination explained.
- To choose to be seen by another doctor or health care provider if that would make you feel more comfortable.
- To provide or refuse consent to any or all parts of your examination.
- To be provided with privacy during all phases of your examination.
- To request the presence of a chaperone during any or all parts of your examination. By SHC policy, some exams require the presence of a chaperone.
- To raise concerns or objections prior to or during your examination.
- To have your examination discontinued at your discretion.
- To be informed that you have the right to make suggestions for service improvement, complaints, grievances, or compliments of care and how to do so.

We hope this information has been helpful and provides useful insight to the process and procedures involved in this part of your care. Please ask questions of your doctor or other healthcare provider. We are honored to facilitate your healthcare and to contribute to your understanding and knowledge of quality healthcare delivery.

