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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | http://www.merckmanuals.com/site_images/mm/s.gif | ***Routine Visits:***Generally, everyone should routinely see their doctor, dentist, and eye doctor for preventive care. Women should routinely see their primary care doctor or gynecologist for gynecologic examinations. People can obtain a schedule of what type of care is required and how often visits are needed from their primary care doctor. Usually, infants and older people need more frequent preventive visits, but frequency also depends on a person's health conditions. For example, a person with diabetes or a heart disorder (or risk factors for them) may need to have checkups relatively frequently.  ***Visits for a Problem:***When symptoms or other medical problems develop between preventive visits, people may be unsure whether they need to see a doctor. Many symptoms and problems can be handled at home. For example, most routine colds do not require a doctor's attention. Many small cuts and abrasions can be handled by first cleaning them with mild soap and water, then applying an antibiotic ointment and a protective covering (see [First Aid: First-Aid Treatment](http://www.merckmanuals.com/home/injuries_and_poisoning/first_aid/wounds.html#v829545)).  People with certain disorders should see a doctor sooner rather than later when new symptoms develop. For example, if people with a chronic lung disorder (such as asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) begin to have difficulty breathing or if people with a weakened immune system get a fever, they should see a doctor promptly. The immune system may be weakened by diabetes, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, use of chemotherapy drugs, or other conditions.  When unsure about the need to see a doctor or other practitioner, people can sometimes call their primary care doctor for guidance. Some doctors can be contacted by e-mail for nonemergency questions. Others prefer to be contacted by telephone. Doctors cannot give set guidelines for when to see a doctor and when it is unnecessary because symptoms with the same cause vary too much and symptoms with different causes overlap too much. However, some problems clearly require a call to a health care practitioner. | |

