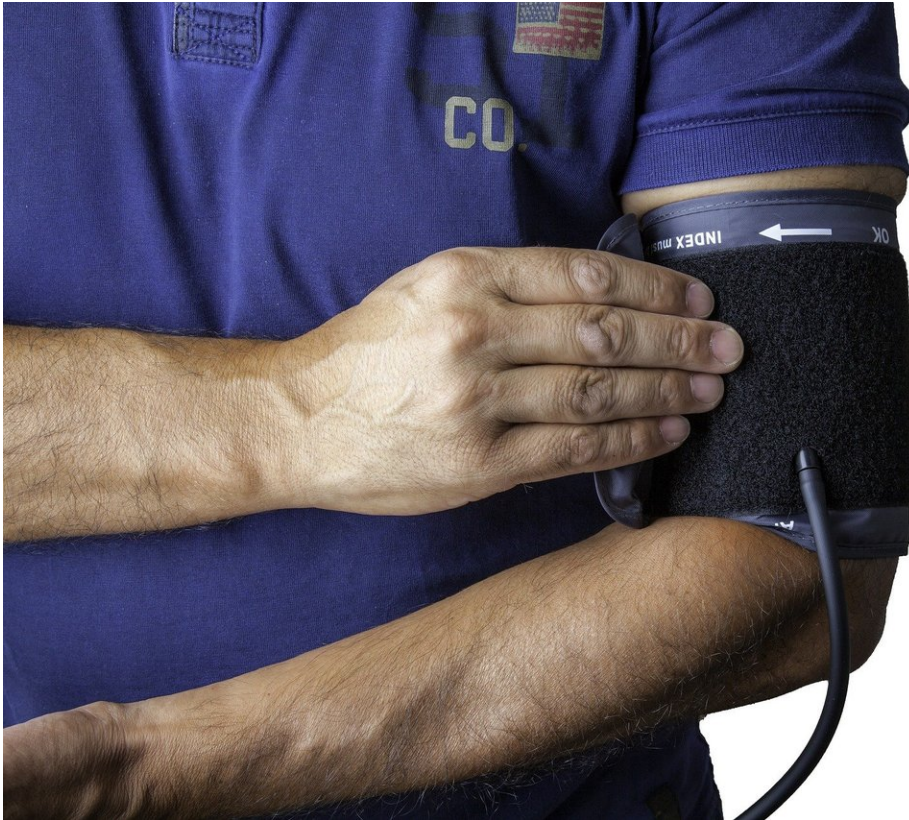


Health checks from age 40 avoid 'black hole'

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Seeing a health professional for a full health screening—even when you feel healthy—from around age 40 enables people to make changes when problems first set in, experts say.

Flinders University research on a group of 561 seemingly [healthy adults](#)

found that there was an average of five unidentified [health](#) problems per person, including undiagnosed blood pressure or early hearing loss.

The 21 health domains tested hearing, memory, lung function, foot sensation, balance, diet and physical activity.

In the 561 seemingly healthy community-dwelling adults aged 40 to 75 years, the average number of health issues was five—irrespective of decade of life.

"People in their middle years are being sucked into the black hole of ageing," says Flinders Strategic Professor Sue Gordon, Chair of Restorative Care in Ageing.

"Small reversible changes in health are accumulating unnoticed while people are time poor and their lives consumed by work and parenting."

Often we don't notice the problem until it's too late for the individual to self-manage, and vastly more expensive to address.

"So even 40 and 50 year olds have health issues most of which are amenable to change."

The [health issues](#) included:

- 30% of people with undiagnosed high blood pressure
- 32% were experiencing memory and cognition problems
- 34% with undiagnosed functional hearing loss

The good news?

Many of the changes were reversible and six months after getting their report, many can adopt health advice and experience better health. "This

shows that individualised screening and self-management recommendations do improve health, even among people who feel healthy. It also may save lives and money later on," Professor Gordon says.

Little is known about the trajectory of ageing through the middle years, known as the 'black hole' of ageing, Professor Gordon says, calling for Australia to increase national spending of just 1.5% of the health budget on [health promotion](#) and prevention services.

"Australia needs to move from an over-burdened reactive health system to proactive best health through middle and older life.

"While the baby boomer generation require different health services that are not condition specific or medically focused, the next generation of higher educated and super funded retirees are on their way.

"Individual health screening and self-management should be a cornerstone to empower healthy ageing in Australia and avoid the black hole of middle ageing."

While genes and injuries alter health, lifestyle and health self-management choices are within our control, but only if we know what areas of our health are declining, she says.

Many issues can be reversed or stopped with self-management and directed care.

The study, including input from experts in population, public and digital health, aims to empower and encourage people to stay well, stay in touch and get the most out of life while avoiding frailty and reducing demand on hospital and health services.

Those involved in the health screening received a report about their health with directions to access self-management information to change their health.

More information: Susan Gordon et al, Health deficits in community dwelling adults aged 40 to 75 years, *BMC Geriatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1186/s12877-019-1152-9](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-019-1152-9)

Provided by Flinders University

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