

Checking in on checkups

BY MICHAEL POWER
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Sure, you exercise and try to eat well. Maybe you poke around on the Internet looking for health and medical advice, too.

How about a regular checkup with your doctor? These days, do people still fit a yearly physical into already packed schedules?

"It depends on the age," said John Fitzsimons, a doctor who practises at clinics in Bradford and Aurora.

Patients between 20 and 30 likely don't need to come in for a yearly physical, he said, but as those patients get older, the need for preventive maintenance increases.

'People who are smoking or drinking too much know they're smoking and drinking too much.'

And if you're between 30 and 50, your need for a regular checkup depends on risk factors such as family medical history and whether you smoke. Patients older than 50 should visit their doctors annually.

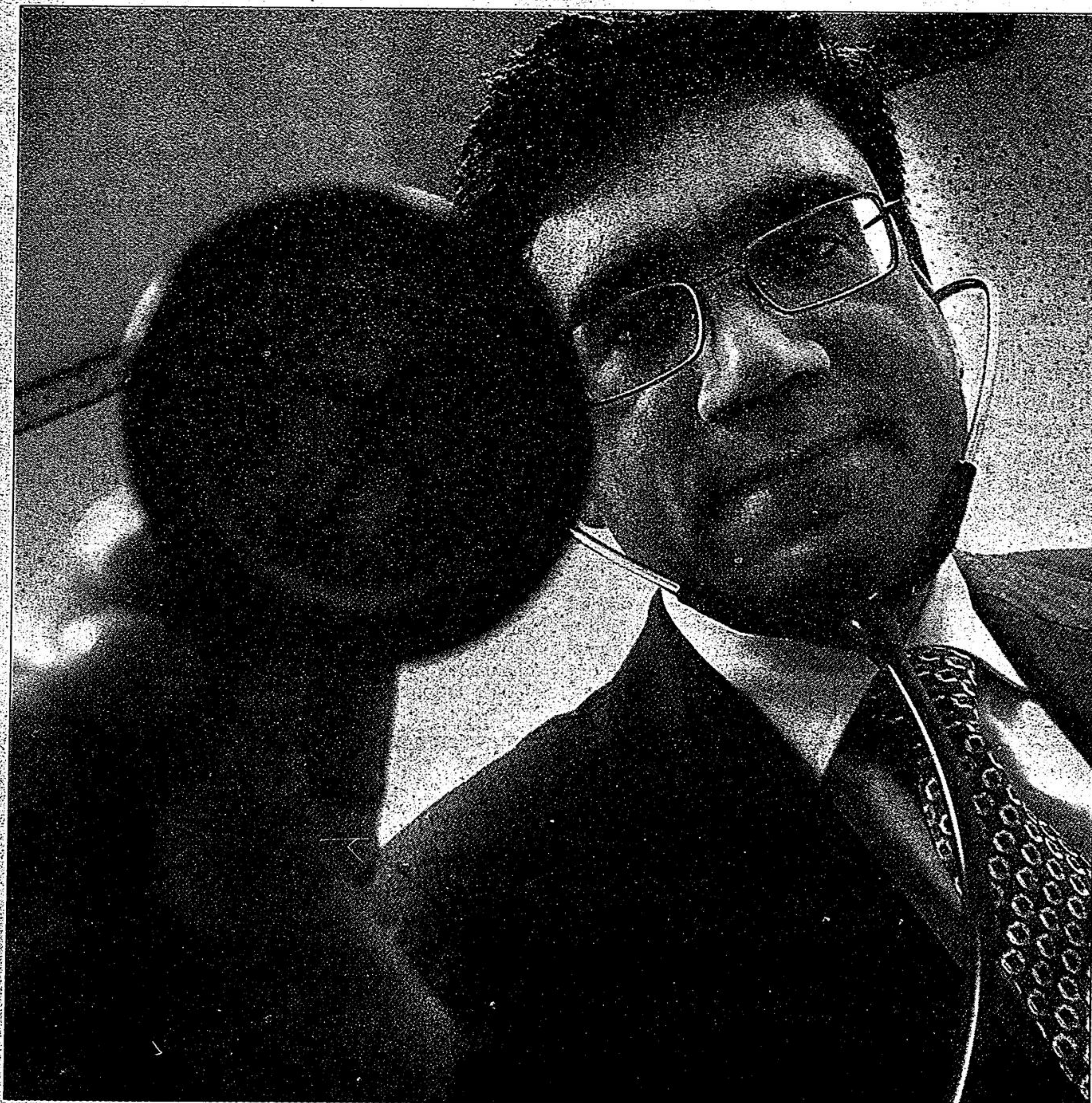
Also, younger patients should get checked out regularly if there's a family history of conditions such as prostate or colon cancer, Dr. Fitzsimons said.

"You can't fit everyone into the same category," he said, noting roughly 25 per cent of his patients come in for regular checkups. "I think it's best if you look at each case."

Often, patients who lead healthy lives are the ones who regularly visit their doctors, while those with risky lifestyles visit less, said Robert Doherty, chief of family practice at Southlake Regional Health Centre.

"People who are smoking or drinking too much know they're smoking and drinking too much and that's what I tell them," he said, adding about half his patients visit regularly.

The province recently



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

A checkup is also a good way for doctors to get to know their patients, Dr. Nick Voudouris said.

moved to provide more funding for nurse practitioners, as well as ensuring higher enrolment in medical schools, he said.

That will help ensure you can receive examinations as well as regular follow-ups, which are tough if you only visit walk-in clinics.

"We're certainly trying to do all we can," he said.

People getting regular checkups often do so because of long-standing habits of visiting their doctors, said Dr. Nick Voudouris,

chief of family practice at York Central Hospital.

Just as often, patients who don't visit their doctors continue to stay away. That is, unless a major health concern comes up, they apply for insurance or, perhaps, a worried family member asks them to get checked.

As for what to get checked, the answer is different for men and women, Dr. Voudouris said.

Women often visit doctors to get screened for cervical cancer, with young

women wanting to discuss childbirth and contraception.

As women age, medical needs shift toward dealing with the risk of diabetes, high cholesterol and weight gain.

Young men often feel they don't need regular checkups, he said. Still, visits focus on lifestyle choices: they are making

Older men often book regular appointments to monitor and check for conditions such as prostate can-

cer, high blood pressure and cholesterol.

Some studies have shown serious disease might not be caught simply through such regular visits, Dr. Voudouris said. But other, less tangible, reasons can make the regular checkup worthwhile for the average person.

Checkups allow doctors to discuss your lifestyle and recommend changes such as quitting smoking or consuming less alcohol.

A checkup is also a good way for doctors to get to

CHECK IT OUT

Some things to check during physical examinations:

Men

20 to 35 years old

— discuss lifestyle issues such as exercise and if a patient smokes or drinks alcohol.

35 to 50

— prostate check, such as through a blood test and digital exam;
— screening for colorectal cancer;
— conditions such as diabetes and hypertension.

50 and up

— screening for prostate and colorectal cancer;
— diabetes and hypertension;
— cholesterol.

Women

20 to 35 years old

— reproductive health and pap test;
— discuss lifestyle, such as whether a patient smokes, drinks alcohol and exercises;
— discuss osteoporosis risk factors.

35 to 50

— mammogram around age 40;
— perhaps colorectal cancer screening around 50, if family history.

50 and up

— mammogram every two years;
— discussion of diabetes and hypertension;
— could check bone density;
— screening for colorectal cancer;
— cholesterol.

know their patients, Dr. Voudouris said.

"The soft reasons for getting a physical are often the best ones," he said. "So I think it's a valuable experience. You're your own best asset, so you want to make sure you're all right."



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