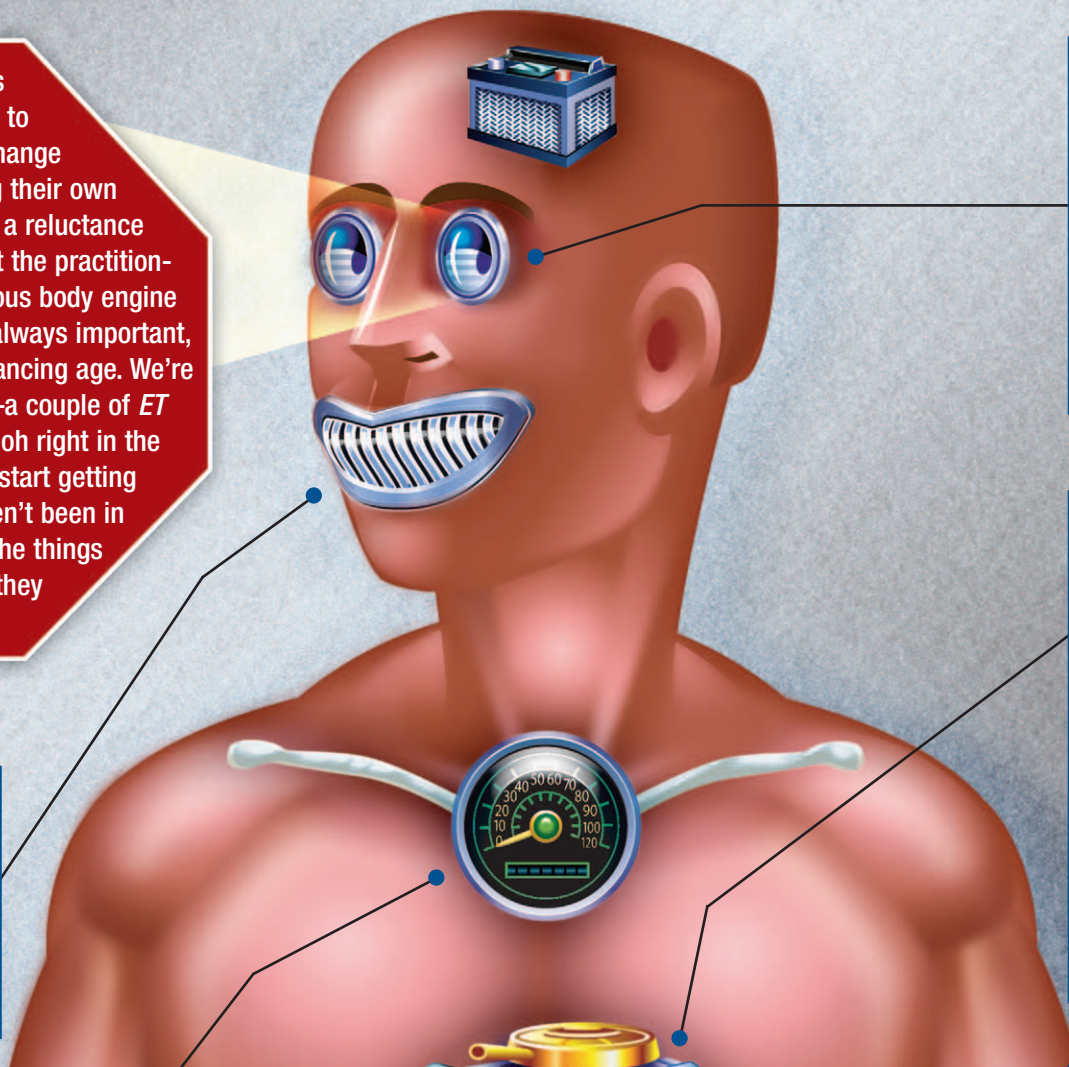


The 50-YEAR SERVICE CHECK

By The Editors of *Energy Times*

Sad but true: Guys who wouldn't forget to give their cars an oil change will go years without having their own inner workings inspected. But a reluctance to have one's chassis checked at the practitioner's office can translate into serious body engine failure. While physical exams are always important, they become a necessity with advancing age. We're not saying 50 is old, mind you—a couple of *ET* staffers are staring the big five-oh right in the face—but it's a good time to start getting regular checkups if you haven't been in the habit. Here's some of the things to look for next time they pop your hood.

TEETH: Get those choppers checked at least once a year—untreated gum disease can lead to the kind of low-level inflammation now thought to be a culprit in numerous illnesses, including heart disease.



EYES:

Some experts recommend yearly testing for glaucoma, a condition in which increased pressure within the eyeball can cause blindness if not treated. Presbyopia, the farsightedness that accompanies increasing age, generally starts in one's 40s; time to invest in a pair of reading glasses.

HEART:

Have your blood pressure taken by a professional at least once a year. Checks for cholesterol and blood sugar are part of a metabolic panel (standard blood work) to be done every three years; it should include total cholesterol, LDL "bad" cholesterol, HDL "good" cholesterol and triglycerides (blood fats). Discuss testing for CRP (C-reactive protein), a marker of chronic inflammation, with your practitioner.

THYROID:

The American Thyroid Association suggests an initial check of your thyroid, a gland in your neck that serves as the body's energy transformer, at age 35 with retests every five years afterwards. If you can't seem to lose weight and/or are constantly tired, ask about having your thyroid hormone levels assessed.

LIVER:

Your liver won't send out distress signals until it's pretty banged up. Since the standard metabolic panel includes a liver-enzyme check be sure to have it done every three years; that frequency may need to increase if you have a history of heavy alcohol use or workplace exposure to toxins.

PROSTATE:

Having a yearly digital rectal examination (DRE) is recommended. Blood testing for prostate-specific antigen (PSA) is more controversial; see "10 Things You Should Know About Prostate Cancer" on page 19.



COLON:

Colonoscopy, in which a lighted tube is used to view the entire colon, is the gold standard (although doctors are working on a less-invasive virtual colonoscopy); once every 10 years starting at age 50 is recommended. A fecal occult blood test (FOBT) should be performed every year, but keep in mind it can yield false results, positive and negative.

Don't Forget To:

- Create a list of all your health concerns and discuss them with your practitioner.
- Discuss and update your medical history, including illnesses suffered by close relatives (for help, see www.ama-assn.org/go/familyhistory).
- Be totally honest with your practitioner about habits or lifestyle choices, such as smoking or excessive alcohol use, that can affect your health.
- Set up a screening schedule tailored to your particular needs.
- Ask for a copy of all paperwork for your personal files.

Note:
Screening frequencies are for healthy individuals with no known risk factors. If you have a pre-existing condition or are at risk for one, follow your practitioner's recommendations.