Early disease detection is the use of:

- Screening tests to find health problems before symptoms appear.
- Diagnostic tests, medical exams, and self-exams to find a disease or other health problem early in its course.

Why should you think about early disease detection?
Often, the earlier a disease is diagnosed, the more likely it is that it can be cured or successfully managed. Managing a disease, especially early in its course, may lower its impact on your life or prevent or delay serious complications.

What tests should you have?
The tests you need depend on your age, health, gender, and your risk factors. Risk factors might include family history, such as having a close relative with cancer, and lifestyle issues, such as smoking. Cholesterol screening, for example, is recommended for people who have a family history of early coronary artery disease.

Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant may be screened for genetic conditions, sexually transmitted diseases, and other conditions.

To learn more about suggested tests, review the medical test information form with your doctor.

Who develops recommendations for early disease detection?
Expert panels of health professionals develop recommendations and publish them as guidelines for all health professionals to use. For example, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the American College of Physicians both have guidelines for cholesterol screening, and the American Academy of Pediatrics has guidelines on early childhood screening for many different conditions.

Sometimes different panels make different recommendations. Talk with your doctor to decide which guidelines best meet your health needs.

When should you be tested?
If you are at risk for a disease, you and your doctor will decide whether you should be tested for it. Discuss the testing, the disease, the risks and benefits of the testing, and what action you are willing to take if you have the condition. For example, if your doctor believes you are at risk for osteoporosis, factors to consider before testing include your age, whether others in your family have had osteoporosis, whether you are a postmenopausal woman, and your willingness to take medicine or make lifestyle changes if you test positive for this condition.

In some cases, testing is done as part of a routine checkup.

Source: http://women.webmd.com/tc/early-disease-detection-overview