

Healthy Lifestyle for Older Adults

Why is a healthy lifestyle important?

As you get older, a healthy lifestyle can help:

- Keep your body fit and your mind sharp
- Protect you from disease
- Improve your ability to fight disease
- Keep chronic disease (disease that doesn't go away) from getting worse

A healthy lifestyle includes good healthcare, good nutrition, weight control, recreation, and regular exercise. Avoid harmful substances and do what you can to keep safe. Stay mentally active and socially involved.

Good healthcare

- Have a physical checkup every year.
- If you have new symptoms that you are concerned about, call a nurse advice line or your healthcare provider. Don't wait until the next checkup.
- Take medicines exactly as prescribed and keep your medicines in a safe place. Tell your healthcare provider if your medicine causes problems.
- Have recommended shots (immunizations) and keep up to date with them:
 - A flu shot each year
 - Pneumococcal shot when recommended by your provider
 - Tetanus shot every 10 years
- Take advantage of cancer screening or other health-screening programs in your community.

Healthy diet and weight control

- Eat 3 or 4 small, nutritious, low-fat, high-fiber meals a day. Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods.
- Try to keep a healthy weight. If you eat more calories than your body uses for energy, it will be stored as fat and you will gain weight. If you are overweight, talk to your healthcare provider about weight control.
- Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D in your diet. Calcium and vitamin D, along with exercise, help prevent osteoporosis (bone thinning).
- If you live alone, try eating at your senior center when you can. That way you get a good meal and have company while you eat.

Physical exercise

You need regular but not overly strenuous exercise. It doesn't make sense to get too ambitious and put your back out or tear a knee cartilage. For example, you might try to walk at least a mile a day. Many senior centers have organized walking groups, sometimes in shopping malls before the stores open. Senior

centers often have aerobic exercise classes, swimming, and dancing, too. Ask your healthcare provider to recommend an exercise program that is right for you.

Recreation

Recreation is not limited to sports and team events. It includes any activity that provides relaxation, interest, enjoyment, and exercise. Recreation provides an outlet for physical, mental, and social energy. It can give a sense of worth and achievement. It can help you stay healthy and young at heart as you get older.

We spend much of our adult lives working, getting to work, getting away from work, and worrying about work. Retirement, even if we've been looking forward to it, leaves a pretty big hole to fill. The way you fill that time can make a big difference in your health. You may also lose a sense of your importance when you quit your job. Recreation offers fulfilling ways to rechannel your time and energy and an opportunity to recover a sense of meaning in your life in new ways.

No harmful substances

Smoking and heavy use of alcohol are major factors in diseases of the lungs, heart, and circulation; cancer; motor vehicle accidents; and home accidents. Talk to your healthcare provider if you need help quitting. By the way, it is easier to quit or cut back if you start exercising regularly at the same time.

Personal safety

Take care of your personal safety as well.

- Keep your home well lit, inside and out.
- Get rid of throw rugs, which can cause falls. Keep carpets in good shape. Make sure your floors are not slippery.
- Make sure that your smoke alarm has good batteries and is working.
- Install handrails by staircases and toilets and in bathtubs or showers.
- Use nonskid strips in bathtubs or showers and on staircases.
- Make sure you have a telephone by your bed for emergencies. Keep emergency telephone numbers written in clear, large letters by all telephones.
- If you live alone and are frail and might fall easily, consider a having a personal emergency response system (PERS). This is a button that sends a help-me message by radio to a rescue service. Some senior apartment complexes provide them, or you may be able to get one through your county Area Agency on Aging.
- Review your driving – are you still a safe driver? You can take classes and get yourself recertified at many senior centers.

Mental exercise and social involvement

Mental and emotional health is as important as physical health. Keep in touch with friends and family. Stay as active as possible. Continue to learn and challenge yourself. Things you can do to stay mentally active are:

- Learn something new, like a foreign language or musical instrument.
- Play SCRABBLE or dominoes or do crossword puzzles. If you cannot find people to play these games with you at home, you can play them with others on your computer through the Internet.
- Join a games club--anything from card games to chess or checkers or lawn bowling.
- Start a new hobby.
- Go back to school.
- Volunteer.
- Read.
- Keep up with world events.

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