

Keys to Healthy Aging



Jupiter Images

What is longevity without health? Adults today are looking not only to extend their lives, but to enjoy their extra years. By 2030, the proportion of the U.S. population aged 65 and older will double to about 71 million older adults, or one in every five Americans. The far-reaching implications of the increasing number of older Americans and their growing diversity will include unprecedented demands on public health, aging services, and the nation's health care system. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) works hard to protect health and promote quality of life through the prevention and control of disease, injury, and disability. CDC has developed some keys to preventing some of the most common health issues facing older adults.

Avoiding Brain Injuries Due to Falls

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is caused by a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. TBIs often result in long-term cognitive, emotional, and/or functional impairments. In 2005, TBIs accounted for 50 percent of unintentional fall deaths and 8 percent of nonfatal fall-related hospitalizations among older adults. You can help prevent TBIs in your home by removing tripping hazards in the walkways, using nonslip mats in the shower, installing grab bars next to the toilet and improving lighting.

Getting Vaccinated

Some older adults incorrectly assume that the vaccines they received as children will protect them for the rest of their lives. Some of CDC's adult vaccine recommendations include:

- An annual influenza shot
- One dose of the shingles, or herpes zoster, vaccine for people aged 60 and older

- Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine after age 65

Eating Right & Staying in Shape

As an older adult, regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It can prevent many of the health problems that seem to come with age. It also helps your muscles grow stronger so you can keep doing your day-to-day activities without becoming dependent on others. Older adults need at least an equivalent mix of moderate and vigorous intensity aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening activities 2 or more days a week that works all major muscle groups.

Preventing High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is often called the 'silent killer,' because it usually has no noticeable warning signs or symptoms until other serious problems arise such as heart failure and stroke. There are several things you can do to keep your blood pressure healthy including maintaining a healthy weight and diet, staying active, quitting smoking, controlling your alcohol consumption, and working to prevent or control your diabetes. These actions should become part of your regular lifestyle, but you should also discuss with your health care provider the best ways for you to address your specific high blood pressure issues.

Cancer Screening

Every year cancer claims the lives of more than half a million Americans. Among Americans aged 55-65, cancer is the number one cause of death and the risk for most cancers increase as you age. CDC supports screening for breast, cervical, and colorectal (colon) cancers as recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force.

Depression

Depression is a common and debilitating illness. Experts know that about 80 percent of older adults have at least one chronic health condition, and 50 percent have two or more. Depression is more common in people who also have other illnesses (such as heart disease or cancer) or whose function becomes limited. The good news is that the majority of older adults are *not* depressed. Estimates of major depression in older people living in the community range from less than 1 percent to about 5 percent but rise to 13.5 percent in those who require home healthcare and to 11.5 percent in older hospital patients. Most adults see an improvement in their symptoms when treated with antidepressant drugs, psychotherapy, or a combination of both.