



Health Tips for Older Adults

Being attentive to your changing needs as you get older can make for healthier, happier aging. To optimize your choices for your best health, be mindful of the following:

Regular Health Screenings

Even if you feel fine, schedule an annual wellness visit with your primary care provider (PCP). They will order any blood tests you may need & can set up your regular colon cancer screening tests. Women need annual mammograms & Pap tests as recommended. Men need prostate checks. Your PCP may recommend other screenings like a DEXA scan to check your bone density. Other key points:

- ◆ It is important to keep up with your annual flu shot, the pneumonia & shingles vaccinations, & the Tdap booster shot as needed—ask your PCP about other vaccinations you may need
- ◆ Belly fat is unhealthy—talk with your PCP about your waist-to-hip ratio & your ideal body weight
- ◆ Hearing problems can lead to social isolation & depression—have your hearing tested periodically

Fall Prevention: Strength, Balance & Flexibility

As we grow older we lose muscle strength & our flexibility decreases. Having good strength, balance & flexibility might mean the difference between a misstep & a major fall. Falls are the leading cause of injury to people over 65, with most occurring in the home. Health conditions such as low blood pressure, diabetes, & certain medications can also increase your risk of falling.

Exercise is crucial to maintaining health as you age. Everyone knows about aerobic exercise for your heart & lungs. But it's also essential to include stretching to help with balance, flexibility & range of motion. Weight resistance training using stretch bands, free weights or machines at least twice a week will improve muscle strength & endurance. More movement can kick up your metabolism.

Yoga, tai chi & swimming all have positive effects on strength, balance & flexibility. PBS airs different exercise programs on TV in the morning, & there are all types of videos available online, including workouts for any type of exercise or mobility issues. Seated chair exercises can still make you sweat.

More Safety Guidance

- ◆ Watch where you're going—missing a step will cause you to fall
- ◆ Keep your glasses clean & visit your eye doctor regularly
- ◆ Wear well-fitting nonslip shoes, even indoors (better & safer than bare feet, socks or slippers)
- ◆ In wet or icy conditions take short steps to reduce the odds of slipping—wear solid boots or shoes & make sure hats or scarves don't interfere with your vision or hearing
- ◆ Declutter—remove anything you can trip over from floors & stairs, including those throw rugs!
- ◆ Create clear paths through each room & get rid of unstable furniture
- ◆ Make sure frequently used objects in cupboards can be accessed without a stool or ladder
- ◆ Clean up all spills immediately
- ◆ Don't rush to answer the phone or doorbell—take your time
- ◆ Watch your alcohol intake as your body's ability to metabolize alcohol changes as you age—alcohol can impair your stability, not to mention your judgment
- ◆ Place nightlights in your bedroom, halls & bathroom
- ◆ Get up slowly, especially at night
- ◆ Get help to carry heavy objects up & down stairs

Diet

Good nutrition is important as you age due to changes in body composition & the digestive system. Discuss weight concerns with your PCP & find out how to attain your ideal weight. Some nutrition advice:

- ◆ Treat your calories like a budget & ask yourself: "Do I really want to spend my calories on this?"
- ◆ Increase your intake of vegetables, fruits & whole grains, decrease your intake of meat & dairy
- ◆ Add flavor to meals with healthy fats like olive oil & avocado in small amounts—use things like bacon & cheese in small quantities & ditch low-fat foods which are often full of sugars, starches & additives
- ◆ Steer clear of processed foods to avoid chemicals & additives, including sugars of all types
- ◆ Drink fluids throughout the day: good choices are water, milk, orange juice & Pedialyte—dehydration can have serious health consequences, including the risk of falls due to confusion or disorientation

Emotional Health / Beating Loneliness

Many events can trigger a change in emotions. Among them are a recent move, losing the ability to drive, a new health diagnosis, & loss of an intimate partner, friend or beloved pet. Mobility issues & chronic health problems (yours or a family member's) may impact opportunities for social connections.

Loneliness can impact your happiness & exacerbate existing health problems. Increase those types of social interactions that fulfill you & make you happy. Spend quality time with other people. Here are some suggestions for cultivating a positive, meaningful social network to enrich your life:

- ◆ Check out your Area Agency on Aging/Senior Center activities—in Helena that great resource is Rocky Mountain Development Council, 200 South Cruse Avenue, 406.457.1680
- ◆ Attend local events that interest you, connect with a spiritual community, volunteer someplace whose mission you really care about
- ◆ Use technology like cell phones, tablets or computers to connect with others
- ◆ Challenge your brain by reading, doing puzzles, painting, knitting or woodworking
- ◆ Consider fostering or adopting a pet



If you are experiencing mood or behavior issues such as anxiety, depression or addiction, see your PCP for help or referral to a behavioral health provider.

Sleep

Ask your PCP for the Tips for Better Sleep handout for information about improving your sleep.

Stress Management

Ask your PCP for the Managing Stress handout for information about dealing with stress in your life.

Making Changes Successfully

You have to choose healthy habits over & over again every single day. One new health habit can lead to others, each small step building on the last to create a new life & a healthier you.

Tell others about the changes you want to make in your life. Once others know, it's harder to retreat from your intention to change. Don't get discouraged, persevere. Give a new activity 90 days. Research says most life changes take at least 3 months to become a habit. Your end goal is better quality of life.

PS: Aging in Place Aids

- ◆ Switch round door knobs to lever handles for easier opening
- ◆ Make sure all stairs have handrails & install no-skid strips on all stairs, including porch, patio & garage accesses
- ◆ Get rid of small throw rugs or replace them with low-profile slip-proof rugs
- ◆ Add lights in all closets—tap lights will work just fine
- ◆ Install grab bars in your bathroom by tubs, showers & toilets, & use slip-proof mats in all tubs & showers—consider shower chairs & tall toilet seats if you have problems sitting or standing
- ◆ If you have cracked sidewalks or driveways that create a trip hazard, have them fixed