

Health and Human Sciences

AGING WELL

One in a series that focuses on improving outcomes for seniors and their families.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Planning for a Healthier Tomorrow

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Health goals become more important as we age, especially those related to nutrition, exercise, family, and finances. New habits of exercise, healthy cooking, family traditions, and planning for retirement are pushed to the front of the list. This article will discuss starting points to build upon in each category.

NUTRITION/FOOD

As you age, your body's nutrition needs change. Think of the food you eat as fuel for your body. Feeding the body healthy foods is important for your energy levels and overall wellbeing. Here are four things you should remember about nutrition.

1. Plan healthy meals ahead of time. Each week, choose healthy meals to make, then grocery shop to have the items needed on hand. Keep healthy snacks (apples, carrots, etc.) easily accessible.
2. A key aspect of eating healthy is portion control. In the United States, our portion sizes are out of control. Many restaurants serve portions that would be enough for two meals. Review the picture (left) for basic portion sizes.
3. Eat foods that are natural and not processed, such as fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables. Avoid processed foods, such as canned foods.
4. Talk to your health care provider about supplements such as calcium, Vitamin D3, Vitamin B12, and fiber.



EXERCISE

Keeping your body active with routine exercise has many benefits. Identifying your current exercise ability is very important. If you haven't had any recent exercise, start with walking 5 to 10 minutes daily. Gradually increase your exercise time to 30 minutes daily. If you become too tired to complete 30 minutes at one time, split up the 30 minutes throughout the day (10 minutes x 3).

To avoid injury, remember to stretch before and after activity, drink plenty of fluids, and stop when you feel discomfort/pain. Other low-impact exercises include yoga, tai chi, Pilates, biking, and swimming. You can do exercises in your chair, such as rising from a sitting to a standing position, then back to a sitting position; lifting small weights (1-2 pounds or a can of vegetables) over your head, and curling your arms at the elbow. Prior to starting an exercise program, talk to your health care provider about your plan and goals. That's especially important if you are uncertain whether it's safe for you to start exercising.

FAMILY/FRIEND RELATIONSHIPS

Strong relationships are very important throughout our life. Spending quality time with family and friends makes life more enjoyable and reduces depression. Some adults forget to add "play time" in their weekly routine. Close family/friends are more likely to assist with care if needed. As friends age and pass away, the thought of making new friends can be difficult, but it is important for our overall health to continue making healthy relationships. Research shows that people live longer if they have healthy relationships with family and friends. Ways to build new friendships include volunteering, joining a club, taking a class, and joining a fitness center. Effective communication, supporting each other, and sincere caring about each other's wellbeing are characteristics of a healthy relationship.

LIVING ON A BUDGET

Many older adults are living off of a fixed budget. If older adults do not have a pension plan or 401(k) at retirement, they might be living off their monthly Social Security check. Below are some helpful hints about monthly budgeting.

1. Use a monthly budget worksheet. It will help you set and track your money during the month. Examples can be found on AARP's and National Council on Aging websites.
2. Identify the "must have" items versus the "nice to have" items in your monthly budget.

GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

Why is exercising as we age so important?

1. *Helps keep healthy bones, joints, and muscles*
2. *Improves mood and reduces anxiety*
3. *Maintains/increases energy level (stamina)*
4. *Assists with weight control*
5. *Helps with balance and walking*
6. *Helps reduce pain with chronic conditions, such as arthritis*
7. *Helps maintain independent living*

3. Protect yourself from fraud. Don't give anyone your Social Security number, bank number, or credit card information over the phone.
4. Identify pharmacies with lower medication costs.
5. Use grocery fliers to make a list of food items on sale. Don't buy items that are not on your grocery list.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

General

National Institute of Health
<https://nihseniorhealth.gov/>

Nutrition

Choose My Plate
<http://choosemyplate.gov/older-adults>

<https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet42ChoosingHealthyMealsAsYouGetOlder.pdf>

Exercise

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderad.htm>

Relationships

Older Adults' Health and Age-related Changes (American Psychological Association)
<http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/guides/older.aspx>

Social relationships and Health: A Flashpoint in Health Policy
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158/>

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