

A Guide to Managing Your Health

Cambodian American Older Adults



This guide is for you, whether you were born in the U.S. or came from another country.

As an older Cambodian American, you may be at higher risk for some diseases because of your family history, lifestyle, healthcare system, environment, or immigration status. Some common health problems for older Cambodian Americans include heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. Other concerns are tobacco and alcohol use, depression and mental illness.

When you visit your doctor or healthcare professional, it's important to share your health needs, cultural beliefs, and any questions you have. This helps your healthcare professional provide the best care and keep you healthy.

In this guide, we will talk about some health risks for older Cambodian Americans and how to talk to your doctor about your health.

Special Healthcare Concerns of Older Cambodian Americans

Heart Disease and Stroke

Your risk of heart disease or stroke is higher if you have high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, obesity, smoke, or don't exercise much.

To lower your risk:

- Eat foods low in fat and salt.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables, and limit meat and sweets.
- Drink less alcohol—no more than one drink a day for women and two for men.

Other ways to stay healthy include exercising daily, quitting smoking, and controlling blood pressure. Ask your healthcare professional for advice on how to stay healthy.

If you have chest pain or trouble breathing, you might be having a heart attack. Call 911 or go to the emergency room right away.

If you have trouble speaking, weakness on one side of your body, or a bad headache, you could be having a stroke. Get help right away by calling 911 or going to the emergency room.

Cancer

Older Cambodian Americans are at risk for cancers, especially liver cancer and cancers of the mouth.

To help catch cancer early:

- Tell your healthcare professional about any new symptoms. Don't wait.
- Make an appointment if you notice a lump in your breast, trouble breathing, a long-lasting cough, or blood in your urine or stool.
- Ask your healthcare professional to screen for cancer.

To lower your risk, avoid alcohol and smoking, eat a healthy diet with fruits and vegetables, and get physical activity.

Diabetes

Diabetes causes high blood sugar and can damage your eyes, kidneys, and heart. It can get worse if you eat unhealthy foods, don't exercise, or are overweight.

To manage diabetes:

- Eat fewer carbs like white bread and pasta.
- Eat more vegetables and low-calorie foods.
- Drink water or sugar-free drinks instead of sugary drinks.
- Exercise for 30 minutes a day, five days a week.

Your doctor will check your blood sugar, blood pressure, and kidney health. Be sure to check your feet daily and report any problems right away. Get your eyes checked every 1 to 2 years.

Tobacco Use

Smoking harms your health:

- Tobacco causes cancer, lung disease, high blood pressure, and strokes.
- E-cigarettes and smokeless tobacco are also harmful.

If you smoke, quitting will help your health. Talk to your healthcare professional about ways to quit and call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for help.

Depression

Getting older doesn't always lead to depression, but it can happen. Depression is a serious illness and can cause other health problems.

Signs of depression include:

- Feeling sad, tired, or irritable
- Losing interest in things you enjoy
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Poor appetite
- Trouble thinking

If you feel depressed or have thoughts of hurting yourself or others, talk to your healthcare professional. They can recommend therapy and medications to help. Family and friends can also support you.

Alcohol Use

In the United States, Cambodian Americans may have high rates of alcohol use. Drinking too much alcohol can lead to higher risks of falls or injuries and affect other health conditions. It's best to drink less alcohol:

- Women should have no more than one drink per day.
- Men should have no more than two drinks per day.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is an infection that can affect your liver. Testing and vaccinations are important. Let your healthcare professional know if you've never been tested for or vaccinated against Hepatitis B.

Preventive Health

Preventing disease or finding it early can help you stay healthy. See your healthcare professional at least once a year to catch diseases early.

Some preventive health tips:

- Get tested for Hepatitis B.
- Get cancer screenings, like mammograms, prostate exams, or colonoscopies.
- Get vaccinated for flu, pneumonia, shingles, RSV, and COVID-19.
- Let your doctor know if you take herbs, vitamins, or other supplements, so they can make sure they are safe to take with your other medications.

Communicating with Your Healthcare Team

Your healthcare team may include doctors, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, and others. Each person has special training to help you in different ways.

Your healthcare team needs to know about your culture and what's important to you to give you the best care. This includes any health beliefs and practices that may affect your treatment. If you came from another country, sharing your immigration history can also help your healthcare provider understand your health risks. See the Tip Sheet on Cultural Considerations when Communicating with Your Healthcare Team for helpful suggestions.

Your healthcare professional will want to help you stay healthy and treat any problems you may have. Be open with them to get the best care possible.

**We hope this information has been helpful to you.
Be sure to let your healthcare providers know if you
or your family members have any questions.**



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The AGS Health in Aging Foundation is dedicated to improving the health, independence, and quality of life of all older people. We aim to empower older adults and caregivers to actively participate in their health care and decision-making.

DISCLAIMER: This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other healthcare provider. Always consult your healthcare provider about your medications, symptoms, and health problems. June 2025
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