

A Guide to Managing Your Health

Hispanic/Latina/ Latino Older Adults



As an older Hispanic/Latina/Latino (hereafter referred to as Hispanic) American person, this resource is for you, whether you were born here or came from another country.

You may have higher risks for some diseases because of your genetics, health habits, how the healthcare system treats you, your environment, or immigration status. Health concerns include heart disease and stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis, cancer, tuberculosis, and hepatitis B.

We will discuss some of these diseases and give you tips to talk with your healthcare professional.

Special Healthcare Concerns of Older Hispanic Americans

Heart Disease and Stroke

Your risk of having a heart attack or stroke is higher if you have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, smoking, and do little physical activity. Hispanic adults often have these risk factors.

Eating foods low in fat, salt, and sugar is important. So is eating lots of fruits and vegetables. Limit the alcohol you drink to one drink per day for women and two for men.

Other things can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. These include getting daily exercise, quitting smoking, controlling blood pressure, and taking recommended medications. Talk to your healthcare professional about how to reduce your risk factors and follow their advice.

Heart attacks can happen when the heart's blood supply is blocked or stopped. Strokes can happen

when the brain's blood supply is blocked or stopped. Brain cells can die within minutes.

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away if:

- If you have chest pain and/or shortness of breath as these might be symptoms of a heart attack.
- If you have trouble speaking, weakness on one side of your body, severe headache, or loss of vision or balance as these might be symptoms of a stroke.

Diabetes

Diabetes causes high blood sugar levels and leads to other health problems, including damage to your eyes, kidneys, and heart. Diabetes can get worse if you eat unhealthy food, do little exercise or are overweight or obese.

Some tips for managing diabetes include:

- Avoid sugars in your diet, such as cookies, chips, candy, and soda.
- Eat more vegetables and low-calorie foods like beans.
- Drink water (preferred) or sugar-free beverages instead of sugary beverages
- Increase your exercise. It is recommended to exercise for 30 minutes per day, five days a week, but any amount of physical activity is good for your health.
- Check your feet daily and report any skin problems to your healthcare professional immediately.
- See your eye doctor every 1 to 2 years.

Your healthcare professional will check your blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and kidney function. Talk with them about how to eat healthy, exercise, and take the medications you may need.

Obesity

Eating more food than your body needs can contribute to overweight or obesity. If you eat foods that are high in fat and sugar or drink sugary drinks you can gain weight. Getting little exercise and not enough sleep can also cause you to gain weight.

Having overweight or obesity can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, heart disease, sleep apnea (problems with breathing during sleep), and even cancer. Obesity can also make breathing worse and cause more pain and problems with walking.

Some ways to lose weight include:

- Stop eating unhealthy food and eat more fruits and vegetables. A dietitian (a person trained in healthy nutrition) can evaluate what you usually eat and help you create a healthier diet with fewer calories.
- Walk or do a similar type of exercise for 30 minutes a day most days. Resistance exercises such as lifting weights are important to avoid losing muscle as you age.

Free exercise videos can be found on the internet.

These videos can help you create an exercise program at home. Also, some insurance plans will pay for an exercise program such as Silver Sneakers.

Talk to your healthcare professional about ways to lose weight and improve your fitness and quality of life.

Tobacco and Marijuana Use

Smoking causes many health problems:

- Tobacco has chemicals that are bad for your health. They can cause cancer, lung disease, high blood pressure, and strokes.
- Marijuana can cause the heart to beat faster and increases blood pressure.
- E-cigarettes (vaping) and smokeless tobacco (chewing gum, snuff tobacco) also cause serious health problems.
- Your family and friends can breathe in your smoke and get health problems from second-hand smoke. For example, children who live with people who smoke can develop asthma.

Older adults who quit can improve their health. However, it can be hard to stop. Get help by:

- Talking with your healthcare professional about ways to quit smoking.
- Calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW. It is a toll-free number operated by the National Cancer Institute that will connect you directly to your state's tobacco quit line support system.
- Taking medications that can help you stop smoking.

Breathing disorders

Hispanic women and men often have asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, and chronic bronchitis. Smoking is the most common cause of these breathing disorders.

If you smoke, please try to quit and stay away from people who are smoking. Air pollution also can make your breathing worse.

Medications and exercise can improve your breathing. Healthcare professionals and pharmacists can show you how to use your inhalers correctly.

Cancer

Cancer is a leading cause of death in Hispanic populations. Liver, stomach, and cervical cancers are more common.

Discovering cancer early leads to better results. So, ask your healthcare professional to screen for cancer so it can be found earlier. So:

- Discuss new symptoms with your healthcare professional. If you don't, cancer can be harder to find and treat.
- Make an appointment with your healthcare professional quickly if you experience any of the following: feeling a lump in your breast; developing new shortness of breath, a long-lasting cough, or coughing up blood; or developing difficulty urinating or finding blood in your urine or stool.

Avoiding alcohol, stopping smoking, and regular screening can decrease your risk of getting cancer. So can exercise and having a healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables.

Depression and mental illness

Getting older doesn't lead to depression or severe sadness. Chemical imbalances in your brain can cause these conditions.

Depression is a serious health condition and can lead to other health problems. Symptoms of depression can include:

- Feeling sad, tired, or irritable
- Lacking interest in hobbies and activities you used to enjoy
- Having trouble sleeping or sleeping too long
- Having a poor appetite
- Being confused or having problems with thinking.

These symptoms can appear to be dementia.

If you have symptoms of depression or have thoughts of hurting yourself or others, talk to your healthcare professional as soon as you can. They can recommend counseling and medications. Family members and friends can support you when you are depressed.

Liver Disease

Liver disease is common and can cause serious illness in Hispanic adults. Some liver disease is due to heavy drinking, obesity, and/or exposure to certain infections like the hepatitis B and C viruses.

Let your healthcare professionals know the amount of alcohol you drink, recent travel, and exposure to other people with hepatitis. Your healthcare professionals can discuss ways to manage liver disease, which might include counseling to stop drinking alcohol or medications.

Dementia

Memory loss and dementia are not a normal part of aging. Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia are the most common types of dementia.

In the beginning of most dementias, people forget things that happened within the last week or month. This is called short-term memory loss. Asking the same questions over and over may be a sign of dementia. The ability to remember details and events from the past, known as long-term memory, is usually not affected when dementia starts. Changes in how a person thinks or behaves should be reported to a healthcare provider.

As a person's dementia gets worse, they have difficulty doing activities like driving, taking their medications, and paying bills. As their dementia gets worse, their behavior can also change. A person with dementia will eventually need help with daily activities like eating, bathing, and dressing.

Some health conditions increase the risk of dementia. These include diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, high cholesterol, depression, smoking, and hearing loss. Doing little exercise also can increase your risk of getting dementia.

If you or a loved one has symptoms of dementia, talk to your healthcare professional. They can determine whether you have dementia or another health problem. The healthcare professional can also prescribe treatments that could slow dementia down. Your healthcare professional and social workers can also connect you to resources available in the community to help you and your loved one.

Preventive Health

Hispanic people often have fewer preventive screenings compared to other groups. Preventing or discovering disease early can limit damage to your body. Seeing your healthcare professional at least once a year will help you prevent diseases or find them early so that they are easier to treat and have fewer complications.

Your healthcare professional will discuss preventive healthcare with you. For example:

- Cancer screenings are important. Some common

screening tests are mammograms, prostate exams, and colonoscopies.

- Vaccinations including flu, pneumonia, shingles, and COVID-19 shots can prevent serious infections. If you are concerned about getting vaccinations, ask your healthcare professional for more information.

- Let your healthcare professional and pharmacists know if you take home remedies, or if you use herbs, vitamins, or supplements. These professionals can help ensure these remedies are safe and don't interact with other medications and treatments.

Communicating with your Healthcare Team

Your healthcare team can include physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, nursing assistants, social workers, pharmacists, therapists, and others. Each team member has special training to help you in different ways.

Your healthcare team will want to know about you, your culture, and what is important to you! You will receive the best care by sharing your cultural beliefs and healthcare practices. These beliefs and practices can affect your health and healthcare treatments. Your healthcare professionals need to know because they want to give you good care and keep you as healthy as possible. See the Tip Sheet on Cultural Considerations when Communicating with Your Healthcare Team for helpful suggestions.

Note that if you have immigrated to the United States, your immigration history may be an important part of your personal story. If your healthcare professional knows your history, that will let them know if you have an increased risk of diseases that are common in other countries. It will also help your healthcare professional to know about treatments or medications you received before coming to the United States. This information can be sensitive, but we encourage you to share this with your healthcare professional.

**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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