

## A Guide to Managing Your Health

### Russian-speaking American Older Adults



**A**s an older Russian-speaking 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.

Some health concerns for Russian-speaking Americans are heart disease and stroke, cancer, diabetes, cancer, tobacco use, and depression.

When you visit your healthcare professional, let them know about your health needs, cultural beliefs and practices, and questions you may have. Your healthcare professionals need to know this information because they want to give you good care and keep you as healthy as possible.

We will discuss some high-risk diseases among Russian-speaking Americans, and tips to talk with your healthcare professional about your health care.

### Special Healthcare Concerns of Older Russian-speaking Americans

#### Heart Disease and Stroke

Your risk of having a heart attack or stroke is higher if you have high blood pressure, heart failure, diabetes, obesity, smoking, and do little physical activity.

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

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

#### Be aware of immediate risks to your health.

If you have chest pain and/or shortness of breath, you might be having a heart attack. If so, you need to call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

Strokes happen when the brain's blood supply is blocked or stopped. Brain cells can die within minutes. If you have trouble speaking, weakness on one side of your body, severe headache, or loss of vision or balance you need to call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

## Cancer

Russian-speaking Americans are at high risk for cancer. Discovering cancer early leads to better results. 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 finding blood in your urine or feces.
- Ask your healthcare professional to screen for cancer so it can be found earlier.

Avoiding alcohol, stopping smoking, and eating a diet low in salt and fat can decrease your risk of getting cancer. So can exercise and having a healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables.

## 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.

Talk with your healthcare professional about how to eat healthily, exercise, and take the medications you may need. Some tips include:

- Decrease carbohydrates in your diet, such as white bread and pasta
- Eat more vegetables and low calorie foods
- Drink water (preferred) or sugar-free beverages instead of sugary beverages
- Increase your exercise to 30 minutes per day, five days a week

Your healthcare professional will check your blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and kidney function. You need to check your feet daily and report any skin problems to your healthcare professional immediately. You need to have your eyes checked every 1 to 2 years.

## Tobacco Use

Smoking causes 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 increase blood pressure.
- E-cigarettes (vaping) and smokeless tobacco (chewing gum, snuff tobacco) also cause serious health problems.
- Your family and friends breathe in your smoke and can 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.

## Depression

Getting older doesn't always lead to depression or severe sadness. These conditions can be caused by chemical imbalances in your brain.

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.

## Special Healthcare Concerns of Older Russian-speaking Americans

Sometimes shame prevents Russian-speaking Americans from getting mental health care. However, depression is a disease that needs treatment. Medications and behavior therapy can help.

### Preventive Health

Preventing or discovering disease early can limit damage to your body. Seeing your healthcare professional at least once a year will help you find out about diseases early so that they are easier to treat and you have better results.

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, herbs, vitamins, or supplements. These professionals can help make sure these remedies are safe to take with your 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 health care practices. These beliefs and practices can affect your health and healthcare treatments. 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. Knowing your history will help your healthcare professional to know about the increased risk of diseases for people who have come from other countries. So will knowing how much access you had to health care before coming to the US. 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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