

For Women: 11 Tips for Good Health in Later Life

Older women are more likely than men to have chronic, or ongoing, health conditions—such as arthritis, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis. Women are also more likely to develop multiple health problems, according to a recent report from the Kaiser Family Foundation. Older women are also more likely to have memory or other “cognitive” problems, and difficulty carrying out daily activities such as dressing, walking, or bathing without help.

Fortunately, there’s a lot you can do to boost your chances of staying mentally and physically healthy as you age. Here’s what the experts with the American Geriatrics Society’s Health in Aging Foundation recommend.

11 Tips for Older Women

See your health-care provider regularly

Even if you feel perfectly healthy, you should see your provider at least once a year for a checkup.

Take medications, vitamins and supplements only as directed

When you visit your provider, bring all of the pills you take, including medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements, even those you buy without a prescription. Your provider should check all of your pills to make sure they are safe for you to take. Always check with your provider before taking any new pills. Take all medicines and other pills as directed, and tell your provider right away if a medication or other pill seems to be causing any problems or side effects.

Get screened

Certain screening tests can help diagnose health problems early. Ask your health-care provider which tests are right for you.

Get vaccinated

Check with your healthcare provider to make sure you’re getting:

- A flu shot: every year in late summer or early fall, before the flu season starts (find more information at www.flu.gov)
- Two pneumonia vaccinations: pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)13 and pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV)23. Ask your healthcare provider about when to take the two vaccines
- A tetanus shot: every 10 years
- The shingles (herpes zoster) vaccine: once after age 60 or older

Reduce your risk of falls and fractures

Get 1,200 to 1,500 milligrams of calcium and 800-1000 International Units (IU) of vitamin D daily. Do weight-bearing exercises such as walking, jogging, and aerobic dancing. If you've have fallen in the past, ask your healthcare provider about local exercise programs that include strength training, balance, and stretching exercises.

Use sunscreen daily

Aging skin is more susceptible to sun damage, which boosts the risk of skin cancer. Use sunscreen all year round and, for added protection, wear a wide-brimmed hat.

Quit smoking

Tell your healthcare provider if you smoke—he or she can help you stop. For additional help, call **1 800-QUITNOW**. It's never too late to quit.

Eat a rainbow

In later life, you still need healthy foods, but fewer calories. Your healthcare provider and the USDA's updated MyPyramid for Older Adults, at <http://mypyramid.gov/>, can help you make good choices. You can also get a personal nutrition plan at the USDA website.

Experts recommend eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily—but less than a third of older adults do this. Don't miss out. Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables. Go for deep colors: dark green, bright yellow, and orange choices like spinach, collard greens, carrots, oranges, and cantaloupe are extra nutritious. Choose fiber-rich whole grain bread, rice, and pasta instead of the white stuff. Pick less fatty meat, like chicken, and low-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt.

Shoot for heart-healthy fish, like tuna or salmon, twice a week. To help keep your bones strong, include sources of calcium and Vitamin D—two daily servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese are a good bet—in your diet. And use healthier fats, such as olive and canola oils, instead of butter or lard.

Drink responsibly

Some women may benefit from one alcoholic drink a day. Check with your healthcare provider to make sure this is right for you. One drink = 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor.

Exercise your mind and body

Regular exercise is important for good health at any age. Exercise tones up your heart and circulation, strengthens bones, boosts brain function, lifts your mood, and can help prevent and ease depression. Your healthcare provider can help you come up with an exercise program that's right for you.

Get involved

Sign up for a class at the local library, senior center, or community college (some offer free classes for older adults). Do word puzzles, number puzzles, jigsaw puzzles — whatever interests you. Make sure you challenge your brain by trying new things, rather than just repeating the same exercises over and over again.