

During the COVID-19 pandemic, your EAP is available for counseling sessions using video or phone

Balanced Living – January 2021

Stay Healthy: Practice Prevention

Medical advances and technology can detect diseases earlier than ever before and save lives, but making prevention a part of your everyday life is just as important.

"Practicing prevention can lower your risk for developing the most deadly chronic diseases: heart disease, diabetes, and cancer," says Tricia Trinité, MSPH, APRN, director of prevention dissemination and implementation for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. "There's nothing mysterious about taking preventive action; it's really just a matter of making healthy choices on a daily basis."

Eat Nutritiously

Eating healthy foods in the right amounts can help you live a longer, healthier life.

Many illnesses and conditions—such as heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes—can be prevented or controlled by eating a healthy low-calorie and low-fat diet that includes at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day, says Ms. Trinité.

Other dietary recommendations include eating more fiber and lean protein, such as chicken and fish, and less sodium, red meat, and sugar.

For specific information on how to improve your diet, ask your doctor and visit the [National Cancer Institute's website](#), the [American Heart Association's website](#), or the [U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans website](#).

Maintain a Healthy Weight

Being overweight increases your risk for heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and high blood pressure. To stay at a healthy weight, you need to balance the number of calories you eat with the number you burn off in physical activity. You can reach a healthy weight and stay there by eating right and being physically active.



Exercise Most Days

Physical activity can help prevent heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, some cancers, and mental health problems, such as depression.

"All kinds of physical activity, whether it's moderate or vigorous, will help you stay healthy," say Ms. Trinité. "It's a good idea to aim for at least moderate activity, such as brisk walking, bike riding, housecleaning, or playing with your children for 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week. Generally, the more active you are, the better you'll feel today and the healthier you'll become tomorrow."

If you've been sedentary, smoke, or have a chronic health condition, ask your health care provider how you should get started with an exercise program.

Stop Smoking

More than 440,000 Americans die each year from smoking and smoking-related causes. Smoking causes illnesses such as cancer, heart and lung disease, stroke, and problems during pregnancy.

"Quitting is hard, and most people try several times before they quit for good," says Ms. Trinité. "But when you're ready to quit, ask your doctor for advice on the best way for you."

Take Medicines Correctly

Always be sure you know important information about a medicine before you take it. This will help you get the full benefit of the drug. It also will help you avoid taking too much or too little, which can be dangerous.

Each prescription medication comes with an information sheet. Be sure to carefully read this sheet. If you have questions or aren't clear about anything on the sheet, check with your health care provider, nurse, or pharmacist.

Get Your Shots

You can prevent several serious diseases by getting immunized. Check with your health care provider to be sure you've had immunization for measles-mumps-rubella, tetanus-diphtheria, whooping cough, and influenza. If you are at risk for hepatitis A, B, or C, you should be immunized against them. People older than 65 should be immunized against pneumococcal pneumonia. Because of a resurgence of whooping cough (pertussis) in adults, a booster shot (in combination with diphtheria and tetanus) is now available for teens and adults.

Get Checked and Screened

Checkups and screening tests help find diseases or health problems early, when they're easier to treat and cure.

"Your doctor can help you decide which health screenings you should get and how often," says Ms. Trinité.

If you have a chronic condition, follow your health care provider's recommendations for regular checkups and screening exams; they are more important if you have a chronic condition.

Healthy adults should also see a dentist once or twice a year and an eye doctor every one to three years. Adults with dental disease or chronic conditions, or those at high risk for specific diseases, should get more frequent exams as recommended by their provider.

For the best preventive care, you also should talk with your provider openly regarding your health concerns.

As People Age, They Grow

Through the daily grapevine of popular culture, we get the message over and over that young is better than old. But new research contradicts these age-old stereotypes. Indeed, studies suggest that the older you get, the happier you become.

If you're surprised, it's probably because you associate old age with disease, depression and disability.

The advantages of being older are that you're settled, you've accomplished things in life, and you're more content with the way you are, experts say. You feel good about yourself from having tested yourself out in the world and achieved success. You might want to be 19 again, but you don't remember the turmoil of being 19.

Those fabulous fifties

These findings were backed up by a study at the University of Georgia, in which two sets of interviews were conducted with the same people, first when they were ages 59 to 80, then 14 years later.

In the earlier set of interviews, the largest percentage chose their 50s as the most satisfying period of their lives. An additional 18 percent picked their 60s and 70s. The childhood and teen years emerged as the unhappiest times; the 30s produced nearly equal feedback as being the best and worst years.

When the same people were surveyed 14 years later, many of the responses remained the same. But 8 percent now said their 80s were the best years.

The common stereotype is that aging is all downhill, but experts say that we should be anticipating good years rather than poor years. After age 50, factors such as more leisure and travel time, the feeling of having "made it," and freedom after the children are grown all figure into the equation.

Particularly for women and older men, happiness tended to hinge on family concerns, the researchers said. They received pleasure from seeing their children successful and happy, or they were unhappy because a child was unsettled.

Although ill health and financial problems may cause unhappiness at a particular age, those factors are not necessarily related to aging. Senior citizens who don't have these problems are no more likely to be depressed than people at other stages of life.



Golden oldies

Your personality changes little after the age of 30, according to the National Institute on Aging. Thus, a person's outlook at age 30 is the best predictor of how happy he or she will be at age 80. If you're a bright, cheery, optimistic person early in life, you'll stay that way as you age. Depression is not a normal accompaniment of aging, barring illness or trauma.

Grow as you age

Experts offer this advice for satisfying senior years:

- Continue to acquire new skills. Develop a hobby. Learn a foreign language. Many people believe that thinking skills naturally deteriorate as you age. But research shows that people who keep learning tend to retain their mental sharpness.
- Be concerned about others. Volunteer, keep pets, make friends with neighbors -- anything that keeps you meeting people. Researchers note these two attributes among older adults who've kept youthful attitudes: They've maintained close relationships and they've kept involved in the community.
- Exercise. You can improve your strength, flexibility and endurance with a surprisingly small amount of effort. The benefits for your physical health will be equaled by the benefits to your mental outlook.

The StayWell Company, LLC ©2021