

WHAT WE DO *makes a difference*

Steps to Healthy Aging



A Growing Number of Us are Growing Older

It's common knowledge that the U.S. population is growing older. Older Americans already make up 17 percent of our country's population. In 2000, almost 46 million Americans were age 60 or older, and 4.4 million of them were 85 or older. By the year 2030, the number of seniors 85 and older is expected to triple, to about 13 million.

In fact, with the first of the baby boom generation turning 65 in only seven years, our society

Tips for Staying Healthier Longer

A retired colonel from the U.S. Army and a veteran of two wars, Sherm lives with his wife of 40 years in their home in Arlington, Virginia. Now he rides an exercise bike every day, does light yard work, and is a leader in his local historical society.

In fact, Sherm's healthful lifestyle almost certainly helped to minimize the effect of his stroke in September 2002. With his doctor's guidance and ongoing physical therapy, he is working his way back to his normal way of life. He is living proof of the positive, life-extending benefits of a healthful lifestyle.

is about to undergo a profound change, as the number of elders begins to swell. But contrary to popular opinion, growing old doesn't mean growing infirm. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging (AoA), recommends that, by following some commonsense guidelines for diet and exercise, older people can add years to their lives—and improve the quality of their lives.

It all begins with getting regular medical care, including checkups. Many doctors recommend routine checkups and an annual flu shot for basic preventive health maintenance.

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Healthy Aging...cont'd.

Steps to Eating Better

Healthful eating can help protect against many diseases that affect older people, such as diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, heart disease, high blood pressure, and more. The AoA through its USA on the Move program recommends eight ways to eat better to prevent disease and promote healthful lifestyles:

- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Eat a wide variety of foods.
- Eat more high-fiber foods made from whole grains, beans, and nuts.
- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol.
- Choose and prepare foods with less salt.
- Eat calcium-rich foods like low-fat milk and cheese for strong bones.
- Drink plenty of beverages and stay hydrated.

Many factors can lead to older people not getting enough of the nutrition they need—difficulty chewing, upset stomachs, living single, not knowing how to cook, or being unable to shop. Fortunately, the Older American Act Nutrition (OAA) Program administered by the AoA helps ensure that older Americans get the nutrition they need to remain healthy. Through this program, the agency sees to it that adults 60 years or older across the country have access to the services and information they need to help them stay healthy and independent.

According to the AoA, the OAA Nutrition Program is more than meals. It promotes health and active social engagement. These services include nutrition screening, education, and counseling. Nutrition services include meals served at areas where older adults meet, such as senior centers and other community gathering places, and through “meals-on-wheels” programs for frail older persons who are homebound.

In addition, in some locations, the program offers nutrition therapy—individualized assistance for people with chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.

These programs are implemented locally by a broad variety of organizations including Area Agencies on Aging, community groups, church programs, and individual providers. These providers of services are collectively known as the National Aging Services Network. Older people who participate in these



programs receive a second benefit in the form of face-to-face interaction with peers that for some is their only regular socialization.

Be Physically Active Every Day

It may sound corny, but it's true: it's never too late to start. As part of the HealthierUS initiative, the president of the United States recommends that Americans young and old incorporate regular physical activity into their everyday routines. Build up gradually from where you are today to a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity a day. Do activities you enjoy such as biking, dancing, or walking. If you can get exercise doing something that interests you anyway, it will be much easier to keep at it.

One of the best resources for older adults thinking about becoming more active is on the Web site of the National Institute on Aging (<http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exercise/toc.html>).

Your next goal is to keep using your muscles. People can lose as much as 20 to 40 percent of their muscle power as they age, but by continuing to use your muscles, you can remain healthy and independent longer.

Another goal is to work on your balance. This is important in preventing falls. Some balance exercises include standing on one foot at a time without any support. Or try getting up from a seated position without using your hands or arms.

A last goal is to maintain flexibility. This can help with motions as simple as turn-



ing your head to see oncoming cars and being able to reach up to a shelf for a box. Talk to your doctor about which stretching exercises are right for you. Warm up first with some endurance or strength exercises, some easy walking, or arm-pumping. And remember, stretching should never cause pain—especially joint pain.

Check with your doctor before becoming more physically active if you are at high risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease or diabetes, or if you smoke or are obese. Naturally, consult your doctor if you experience any new, undiagnosed symptoms, including chest pain; irregular, rapid, or fluttery heartbeat; severe shortness of breath; or ongoing, significant, and undiagnosed weight loss. Remaining healthy and vital in your older years is a gift you alone can give yourself. Almost anyone can do it—you don't need special equipment or training, and it can

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actually become a part of your routine you look forward to! But most of all, eating right and getting exercise will allow you to be independent longer and get more enjoyment out of life.

As the nation celebrates Older Americans Month (OAM) this May, you can learn more

about these and other programs by visiting www.aoa.gov. This year's OAM theme—"What We Do Makes a Difference"—highlights the critical roles each of us play in our own older years and those of others. For information about what resources are available locally, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit www.eldercare.gov.

Need more information?

There is a wealth of information available about healthful living for older people. If you use the Internet, start by visiting the Web site of the Administration on Aging to look for health information (www.aoa.gov) or the Eldercare Locator (www.eldercare.gov) for local information and resources. In addition to plenty of useful resources on the AoA site, you will also find links to other Web sites with valuable information about aging, diet and exercise, and related topics. You can also try some of the addresses shown below for more sites.

If you don't use the Internet, call the toll-free Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116, Monday-Friday between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Internet resources

- <http://www.healthfinder.gov/>

An easy-to-use library for all your health-related questions, from the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/>

A comprehensive resource on aging, including the latest information on healthful living, caring for people with Alzheimer's disease, and more.

- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>
Medlineplus is a special service of the National

Institutes of Health and the U.S. National Library of Medicine. It features a medical encyclopedia, information on assorted health topics and prescription drugs, current health news, and other resources.

- <http://www.aoa.gov/nutrition/default.htm>

A part of the Web site of the U.S. Administration on Aging that explains the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program.

- <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/>

A guide to lowering your blood pressure, developed by the Heart, Lung and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health.

- <http://www.seniors.gov/>

A comprehensive guide to the Web sites of government agencies that serve the elderly population.

- <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/DietGd.pdf>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the definitive resource for the latest nutrition information available, with easy-to-follow tips and suggestions for a healthier diet.

- <http://www.fda.gov>

The Food and Drug Administration provides consumer information on prescription drugs.