

Staying Healthy at 50+ - Put Prevention Into Practice

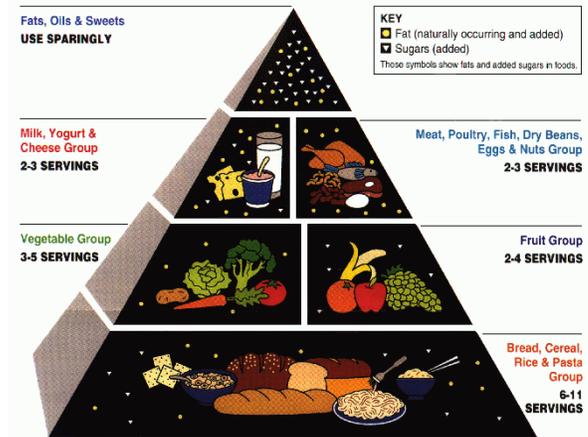
What You Can Do To Stay Healthy

Evidence shows that some of the leading causes of death in the United States, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, some lung diseases, injuries, and HIV/AIDS, often can be prevented by improving personal health habits. Eating right, staying physically active, and not smoking are a few examples of good habits that can help you stay healthy.

Creating a Healthy Lifestyle

Eating Right

Eating the right foods and the right amounts of foods can help you live a longer, healthier life. Research has proven that many illnesses—such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure—can be prevented or controlled by eating right. Getting the nutrients you need, such as calcium and iron, and keeping your weight under control can help. Try to balance the calories you get from food with the calories you use through physical activity. It is never too late to start eating right.



Eating according to the Food Guide Pyramid

Here are some helpful tips.

Eat a variety of foods, especially:

- Vegetables. Choose dark-green leafy and deep-yellow vegetables.
- Fruits. Choose citrus fruits or juices, melons, and berries.
- Dry beans (such as red beans, navy beans, and soybeans), lentils, chickpeas, and peanuts.
- Whole grains, such as wheat, rice, oats, corn, and barley.
- Whole grain breads and cereals.

Eat foods low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol, especially:

- Fish.
- Poultry prepared without skin; lean meat.
- Low-fat dairy products.

Weight Control

Weighing too much or too little can lead to health problems. After age 45, many people gain too much weight. You can control your weight by eating healthy foods and being physically active. For more information, see the next section, “Physical Activity.”

Ask your health care professional:

- What is a healthy weight for me?
- What are some ways I can control my weight?

Keep track of your weight.



Maintain a healthy weight.

Physical Activity



Walk briskly

Research shows that physical activity can help prevent at least six diseases: heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity (excess weight), diabetes, osteoporosis, and mental disorders, such as depression. Physical activity also will help you feel better and stay at a healthy weight. Research suggests that brisk walking can be just as good for you as an activity such as jogging. Try to do a total of 30 minutes of constant physical activity, such as fast walking, most days of the week.

Before you start being physically active:

- Talk with your doctor about ways to get started.
- Choose something that fits into your daily life, such as walking, gardening, raking leaves, or even washing windows.
- Choose an activity you like, such as dancing or swimming.
- Try a new activity, like biking.
- Ask a friend to start with you, or join a group.

Don't quit:

- Make time for physical activity, start slowly, and keep at it.
- If the weather is bad, try an exercise show on TV, watch an exercise tape in your home, walk in the mall, or work around the house.



Work around the house

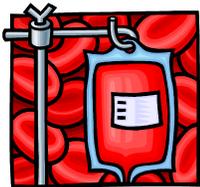
Safe Sex

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as herpes, syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia, are passed easily from one person to the next through sexual intercourse. STDs are more common in people under the age of 50. But, if you or your partner has other sexual partners, you are at risk for STDs. You can lower your chances of getting an STD by using a latex condom every time you have sex. If you have not taken this step, you may need testing for STDs.

HIV and AIDS

AIDS is a disease that breaks down the body's ability to fight infection and illness. AIDS is caused by the HIV virus. By preventing HIV infection, you can prevent AIDS. People in midlife and those who are older can become infected with HIV. In fact, 10% of all AIDS cases in the United States have occurred in people over the age of 50.

How do you get HIV?



HIV is contracted through blood

People get HIV by coming into contact with the blood or body fluids (semen or vaginal fluid) of a person with HIV. You cannot get infected with HIV from casual contact, such as shaking hands or hugging.

If you or your partner have other sexual partners or if you share needles or syringes, you may need testing for HIV. To protect yourself, use a latex condom every time you have sex and do not share needles or syringes.

Taking Charge of Your Health

Menopause

Between ages 35 and 50, the levels of two female hormones, estrogen and progesterone, start to change. The shifting levels of hormones may cause you to skip periods, have irregular bleeding, or both. You may also have such symptoms as hot flashes, mood swings, sleep problems, and painful intercourse.

Talk to your doctor about these changes and how to relieve them. You can still get pregnant during this time, so you may want to use some method of birth control.



Menopause occurs when you stop menstruating for good. Most women reach menopause in their late 40s or early 50s. If you have not had a period for at least 1 year, you are likely to be in menopause. At this point, your hormone levels drop so you are no longer producing eggs. Once this happens, there is no chance of becoming pregnant.

You can take a pill or use a skin patch that contains the hormones estrogen and progesterone to help relieve some symptoms of menopause. Taking these hormones is called hormone replacement therapy (HRT). HRT also may help keep your bones strong and prevent heart disease. But HRT also has risks—it is not for everyone. Talk to your doctor to see whether HRT is right for you.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones break easily. About 70% of fractures in people over the age of 45 are related to osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is more common in women than in men. The loss of hormones that occurs after women have gone through menopause causes their bones to become less dense, or thinner, and therefore more prone to breaking.

You can help prevent osteoporosis by:

- Doing weight-bearing exercises, such as walking, stair climbing, jogging, yoga, and lifting weights.

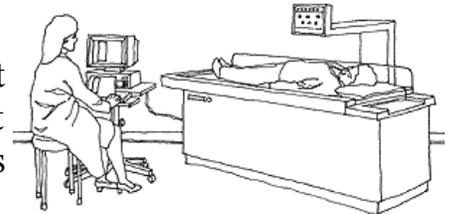


- Getting 1,000-1,300 mg of calcium per day (see page 16).
- Not smoking.
- Taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

Ask your health care provider:

- ◆ How can I get enough calcium?
- ◆ What medicines, such as HRT (for women), can help prevent osteoporosis?

A bone density test can help determine whether your bones are prone to breaking. But there is no evidence that a bone density test is needed for everyone. You may want to ask your health care provider if you should receive this test.



Foods That Can Help You Add Calcium To Your Diet

Most foods in the milk group (choose lower fat, lower cholesterol foods most often, such as skim milk):

- Milk and dishes made with milk, such as puddings and soups made with milk.
- Cheeses, such as mozzarella, cheddar, Swiss, and parmesan.
- Yogurt.



Canned fish with soft bones, such as sardines, anchovies, and salmon.

Dark-green leafy vegetables, such as kale, mustard greens, turnip greens, and spinach.



Tofu, if processed with calcium sulfate. Read the labels.

Tortillas made from lime-processed corn. Read the labels.

Injury Prevention

Following basic safety rules can prevent many serious injuries. Here is a checklist to follow to help keep you safe.

To help protect yourself when you are home:

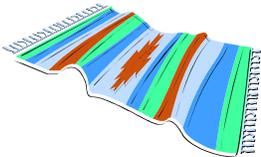
- Use smoke detectors in your home. Remember to check the batteries every month. Change the batteries every year.
- If you keep a gun in your home, lock up the gun and the ammunition separately and keep them out of children's reach.



Smoke Detector

To help prevent falls:

- Make sure that hallways and stairwells are well lit.
- Remove or repair things that could make you trip, such as loose rugs, electrical cords, and toys.
- Put handrails and traction strips on stairways and in bathtubs.



Watch for loose rugs

To protect yourself when you are away from home:

- Always wear seat belts while in the car.
- Never drive after drinking alcohol.
- Always wear a safety helmet while riding a motorcycle or bicycle.
- Be alert for hazards in your workplace and follow all safety rules.



Wear Seat Belts

Taking Medicines



Know the medicines you are taking

Getting information about the medicines you are taking is important for people of all ages. It will help you get the full benefits from your medicine. It will also help avoid problems such as taking too much or too little of a medicine. Taking medicine in the wrong way can make you worse instead of better. Here are some questions you may want to ask your doctor or pharmacist.

About the medicine:

- What is the name of the medicine? Is this the brand or generic name?
- What is the medicine supposed to do?
- What written information is available about the medicine?

How to take the medicine:

- How and when do I take it—and for how long?
- What foods, drinks, other medicines, or activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?

Side effects of the medicine:

- What are the possible side effects?
- What should I do if they occur?

To help you keep track of the medicines you are taking, keep a medicine chart . You may want to share this with your health care provider and pharmacist.

Prescription Medicines and You, published by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), is a free booklet that gives practical tips on how to take medicines safely. It also gives advice on questions to ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. To get a copy of this brochure, call the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse at 1-800-358-9295.

Getting Help When You Need It

Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Abusing alcohol or using illegal drugs can cause serious medical and personal problems. Alcohol and drug abuse can lead to motor vehicle and other accidents, depression, and can cause problems with friends, family, and work. Drug use can cause heart and breathing problems. Alcohol abuse can cause liver and heart problems and throat and mouth cancer.

Advice on Alcohol and Other Drug Use:

- Don't use illegal (street) drugs of any kind, at any time.
- If you drink alcohol, limit the number of alcoholic drinks—no more than one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men.
- Do not drink alcohol before or while driving a motor vehicle or operating heavy machinery.
- If you have concerns about your alcohol or drug use, talk to your doctor.



If you drink, drink in moderation

Read the questions below. A “yes” answer to any of the questions may be a warning sign that you have a drinking problem. Talk to your doctor or other health care provider. Place a check mark next to each question for which the answer is “yes.”

- Have you ever felt that you should cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or guilty about drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

Smoking

Research shows that smoking causes more major diseases than any other personal habit. Some examples are cancers of the lung, mouth, bladder, and throat; heart and lung disease; and strokes. If you stop smoking, you can help avoid these diseases.

It is never too late to stop smoking. Half of all people who have ever smoked have quit.



It's never too late to quit smoking.

When you are getting ready to quit:

- Pick a date to quit.
- Begin by not smoking in places where you spend a lot of time, such as at home or in the car.
- Get support and encouragement—you may want to join a quit smoking program.
- Talk with your doctor about using nicotine replacement products such as gum, patch, nasal spray, or inhaler. Research shows that almost everyone can benefit from using these products.

Once you have quit:

- Don't try even one puff, and try to keep yourself away from all cigarettes.
- If you fail the first time, don't give up. Keep trying and learn from your experiences. Ask yourself what helped or did not help you in trying to quit.

Every time children and others you care about are around cigarette smoke, they breathe in poisons that can cause asthma or cancer. Please, don't expose others to secondhand smoke. Quit for them.

Overcoming Depression

Everybody feels “down” or “blue” at times. But, if these feelings are very strong or last for most of the day, nearly every day, they may be due to a medical illness called depression.



Everyone is “blue”
once in a while

The good news is that depression can be treated. But first you have to know you have it.

People do not always know the warning signs of depression. If you have four or more, be sure to talk to your doctor about depression. Place a check mark next to each sign that you have.

Warning Signs of Depression

- Changes in the way you feel:
- Feeling sad, hopeless, or guilty most of the time.
- Feeling tired, low energy, or feeling “slowed down.”
- Crying a lot.
- Having thoughts of suicide or death.
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits:
- Sleep problems, either too much or too little.
- Changes in appetite or weight (up or down).
- Changes in your daily living:
- Loss of interest and pleasure in daily activities.
- Problems making decisions or thinking clearly.

Treatment

The earlier you get treatment for depression, the sooner you will begin to feel better. **The longer you wait, the harder depression is to treat.**

Depression usually is treated with medicine, counseling, or medicine combined with counseling. Medicines for depression are not addicting or habit forming. They work for people with severe depression and may be useful for people with mild to moderate depression. Treatment works gradually over several weeks. If you do not start to feel better after this time, call your doctor. It may take some time to find what works best for you.

For more information, read Depression Is A Treatable Illness, a booklet that answers some common questions about depression. To get a copy of this free booklet, written by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), call the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse at 1-800-358-9295.

This material was adapted from the booklet Staying Healthy at 50+ Putting Prevention into Action developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ, formerly the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research), AARP, and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

AHRQ is the lead Federal agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, and broaden access to essential services.

AARP is the Nation's leading organization for people age 50 and older. It serves their needs and interests through information and education, advocacy, and community services, which are provided by a network of local chapters and experienced volunteers throughout the country. The organization also offers members a wide range of special benefits and services, including *Modern Maturity* magazine and the monthly *Bulletin*.