

Screening & Prevention

Facts for Older Adults



RAND



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Screening & Prevention

The Best Way to Treat a Disease – Prevent It!

What is prevention?

Prevention means taking steps, including lifestyle changes, to help you avoid developing an illness. It is never too late to start practicing prevention.

We don't always know the cause of disease; however, we do know that unhealthy daily habits and family history are important. Some risk factors, such as age, heredity, gender, and race, cannot be changed. People have control over other risk factors including being overweight, lack of physical activity, unhealthy diet, smoking, drinking too much alcohol, and unprotected exposure to the sun. Lifestyle changes can reduce your risk of developing many serious illnesses, including some cancers, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Vaccination can protect you from getting pneumonia and the flu.

It is important to become aware of your risk for certain diseases by having routine checkups and discussing how to stay healthy with your doctor.



Why is screening important?

Screening examinations and appropriate laboratory tests can detect disease earlier, even before you have any signs or symptoms. Early treatment can prevent some diseases from getting worse and improve the chances of survival from others. Your active participation in your medical care and maintaining healthy daily habits can help you stay healthy and keep you able to do the things you enjoy.



Facts About Screening & Prevention You Can Use

Assessing “the whole you” can enhance the quality of your life

For older people it is important that doctors review many things. This includes medications, diet and nutrition, physical and mental abilities, mood, mobility, hearing, vision, bowel and bladder function, whether there are supportive people around, and how well normal activities of daily living are being done. If problems are detected, appropriate treatment can lead to improved quality of life and to more years of independent function at home.

A healthy lifestyle pays off

Seven good health habits have been demonstrated to be associated with wellness and a long life:

1. Not smoking
2. A balanced diet
3. Sleeping 7 to 8 hours nightly

4. Staying close to ideal weight
5. Eating breakfast regularly
6. Drinking little or no alcohol
7. Not eating snacks between meals



Nonsmokers and former smokers live longer

An improvement in overall health is evident shortly after discontinuing smoking, even at older ages. Those who quit smoking reduce the risk of life-threatening illnesses, such as lung cancer, heart attack, stroke, and chronic lung disease.

New medical treatments, as well as professional counseling, may help you to quit smoking and potentially add years to your life. Ask your doctor to help you quit.

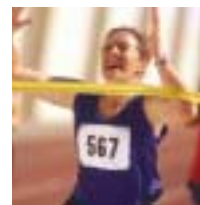


Limiting alcohol consumption reduces health risks

Drinking too much alcohol increases the risk of high blood pressure and probably increases the risk of diabetes, breast cancer, head and neck cancer, and hip fracture. If you think you are drinking too much, you should consult your doctor.

Exercise can help older adults live longer

Exercise also results in other important benefits for older adults, such as reduced bone loss in the spine, lower blood pressure, reduced risk of heart disease and diabetes. Be sure to consult your doctor before beginning any exercise program.



Mammography reduces risks from breast cancer

Mammograms every 1 to 2 years for older women can detect breast cancer early and increase the chance of cure or long-term survival.

Screening reduces the risk of colorectal cancer

Screening reduces the risk of death from colorectal cancer and may help older adults with colorectal cancer to live longer. Screening can be done every 1 to 2 years by testing the stool for blood, or every 5 to 10 years by looking into the colon.



Vaccines prevent the flu and related serious illnesses

The flu vaccine not only helps prevent the flu but also reduces serious flu-related complications such as pneumonia. Yearly flu vaccines are especially important for adults over 65 years of age.

Get vaccinated before the flu season begins

The flu season usually peaks between December and March. Since the flu vaccine takes about 1 to 2 weeks to reach maximum protection, the best time to receive the vaccine is October through the middle of November. However, flu vaccines given after November are still beneficial. Protection provided by the flu vaccine usually lasts only 1 year. Anyone with allergies to eggs or who has had an allergic reaction to a previous vaccine should talk to their doctor before getting a flu shot.

Vaccine helps prevent pneumonia

The most common form of bacterial pneumonia in adults over 65 is caused by the *Pneumococcus* bacteria. The Pneumococcal vaccine prevents most cases of this common pneumonia. Talk to your doctor about getting the vaccine if you haven't had it before.



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