

10 Essential Health Tips For Seniors

From baby boomers to senior boomers: 10 tips to keep you healthy and fit

The first wave of baby boomers are turning 65 years old this year and becoming "senior boomers" and Medicare-eligible. In fact, more than 10,000 baby boomers a day are now turning 65—that's one every eight seconds, a pattern expected to continue for the next 19 years.

Happily, aging is different now than it was for our parents and grandparents. Today, there are more people living longer than at any other time in history. In fact, boomers will number 78 million by 2030. "This generation, associated with social change including the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s, has another important cause—staying healthy," says soon-to-be 65-year-old Arthur Hayward, MD, a geriatrician and clinical lead physician for Kaiser Permanente. "We need to become activists in promoting healthful behaviors and try our best to remain active and healthy the rest of our lives."

How to do it? Dr. Hayward recommends these 10 easy health tips for seniors to help baby boomers live longer and thrive:

1. **Quit smoking.** Take this critical step to improve your health and combat aging. Smoking kills by causing cancer, strokes and heart failure. Smoking leads to erectile dysfunction in men due to atherosclerosis and to excessive wrinkling by attacking skin elasticity. Many resources are available to help you quit.
2. **Keep active.** Do something to keep fit each day—something you enjoy that maintains strength, balance and flexibility and promotes cardiovascular health. Physical activity helps you stay at a healthy weight, prevent or control illness, sleep better, reduce stress, avoid falls and look and feel better, too.
3. **Eat well.** Combined with physical activity, eating nutritious foods in the right amounts can help keep you healthy. Many illnesses, such as heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and osteoporosis, can be prevented or controlled with dietary changes and exercise. Calcium and vitamin D supplements can help women prevent osteoporosis.
4. **Maintain a healthy weight.** Extra weight increases your risk for heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. Use the Kaiser Permanente BMI (body mass index) calculator to find out what you should weigh for your height. Get to your healthy weight and stay there by eating right and keeping active. Replace sugary drinks with water—water is calorie free!
5. **Prevent falls.** We become vulnerable to falls as we age. Prevent falls and injury by removing loose carpet or throw rugs. Keep paths clear of electrical cords and clutter, and use night-lights in hallways and bathrooms. Did you know that people who walk barefoot fall more frequently? Wear shoes with good support to reduce the risk of falling.
6. **Stay up-to-date on immunizations and other health screenings.** By age 50, women should begin mammography screening for breast cancer. Men can be checked for prostate cancer. Many preventive screenings are available. Those who are new to Medicare are entitled to a "Welcome to Medicare" visit and all Medicare members to an annual wellness visit. Use these visits to discuss which preventative screenings and vaccinations are due.
7. **Prevent skin cancer.** As we age, our skin grows thinner; it becomes drier and less elastic. Wrinkles appear, and cuts and bruises take longer to heal. Be sure to protect your skin from the sun. Too much sun and ultraviolet rays can cause skin cancer.
8. **Get regular dental, vision and hearing checkups.** Your teeth and gums will last a lifetime if you care for them properly—that means daily brushing and flossing and getting regular dental checkups. By age 50, most people notice changes to their vision, including a gradual decline in the ability to see small print or focus on close objects. Common eye problems that can impair vision include cataracts and glaucoma. Hearing loss occurs commonly with aging, often due to exposure to loud noise.

9. **Manage stress.** Try exercise or relaxation techniques—perhaps meditation or yoga—as a means of coping. Make time for friends and social contacts and fun. Successful coping can affect our health and how we feel. Learn the role of positive thinking.
10. **Fan the flame.** When it comes to sexual intimacy and aging, age is no reason to limit your sexual enjoyment. Learn about physical changes that come with aging and get suggestions to help you adjust to them, if necessary.

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