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Healthy Aging Tips for the Older Adults in Your Life

If you have older family members or loved ones, you may worry about their health as they age. Aging increases the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, cancer, and dementia. The good news is that adopting and maintaining a few key behaviors can help older adults live longer, healthier lives. As a family member, it's important to encourage healthy lifestyle behaviors in your loved ones — it's never too late to start!

Healthy behavior changes can help older adults live more independently later in life. That's important both for their quality of life and for yours. If a family member loses independence — whether it's due to disability or chronic disease — you may find yourself in a caregiving role earlier than expected, which can affect family dynamics as well as finances.

So what can you do to help the older adults in your life manage their health, live as independently as possible, and maintain quality of life as they age? Read on to learn about four ways to help support and promote healthy habits in your older loved ones' lives.

Prevent social isolation and loneliness

As people age, they often find themselves spending more time alone. Poor health, the death of a partner, caring for a loved one, and other situations that are more likely as people age can all lead to being socially isolated or feeling lonely.

Although they sound similar, social isolation and loneliness are different. Loneliness is the distressing feeling of being alone or separated, while social isolation is the lack of social contacts and having few people to interact with regularly. Increased social isolation and loneliness are associated with higher risks for health problems, such as depression; heart disease; and cognitive decline, which is a decrease in the ability to think, learn, and remember.

As a family member, you can play an important role in helping the older adults in your life to stay socially connected. Here are some ways you can help:

- Schedule daily, weekly, or biweekly phone calls or video chats.



[Read and share this infographic](#) and spread the word about ways that may help foster healthy aging.

- Encourage them to seek out others with shared interests, such as through a garden club, volunteer organization, or walking group.
- Search the [Eldercare Locator](#) or call [800-677-1116](tel:800-677-1116). The Eldercare Locator is a nationwide service that connects older adults and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources.

Find additional tips to help your loved one [stay socially connected](#).



Promote physical activity

There are lots of reasons to make [physical activity](#) a part of daily life. Exercise can help reduce levels of stress and anxiety, improve balance and lower risk of falls, enhance sleep, and decrease feelings of depression. Most importantly, people who exercise regularly not only live longer, but also may live better — meaning they enjoy more years of life with less pain or disability. On the other hand, lack of physical activity can lead to increased visits to the doctor, more hospitalizations, and increased risk of certain chronic conditions.

Encouraging the older adults in your life to exercise may not be easy — it can be difficult to get someone to start a new activity — but the rewards are worth the effort. Following are some suggestions to help encourage exercise or other daily movement:

- Help your loved ones aim for a mix of activities, including [aerobics, strength training, balance, and flexibility](#). This could include walking around the neighborhood, lifting weights, gardening, or stretching.
- Discuss how much activity is recommended and brainstorm ways to work it into their daily lives. Experts recommend at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise, and muscle-strengthening activities at least two days each week.
- Help them shop for [appropriate clothing](#) and equipment for their exercise activities. Remember, many activities don't require expensive equipment. For example, they can use filled water bottles as weights for strength training or walk outside or at a mall rather than on a treadmill.
- Share your favorite activities that get you moving. Are there any you could do together? If so, that's a bonus because you're not only helping promote physical activity but also helping to prevent loneliness and social isolation.

Learn more about the [different types of exercises and find examples to help get started](#).

Encourage healthy eating

Healthy eating is an important part of healthy aging. As with exercise, eating well is not just about weight. Having a healthy diet can help support muscles and strengthen bones, which can help with balance and independence. A nutritious diet involving a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and lean proteins also can help boost immunity and lower the risk of certain health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers.

While it can be meaningful to share meals based on traditional family recipes, in some cases, those favorite dishes can be loaded with unhealthy fats and sugars. Changing long-held habits can be tough, but before you know it, there

may be some new favorite foods on the table!
Consider these tips to help incorporate a healthy diet in your loved ones' routines:

- Take them on a trip to the grocery store and pick out healthy options.
- Discuss their favorite traditional recipes and talk about whether you can make them healthier; for example, by substituting olive oil for butter, or yogurt for sour cream.
- Visit them once a week and make a healthy meal together. Consider cooking extra and packaging leftovers so they have individual servings to enjoy later in the week.
- Look inside their fridge and pantry when you visit. You can check for healthy options, and also ensure they aren't eating expired food or drinks.
- Encourage them to talk with their doctor or pharmacist about their diet and any [vitamin and mineral supplements](#) they may need.



Learn more about [healthy eating patterns and ways to create a nutritious meal plan](#).

Schedule regular check-ups with a doctor

It's important for your older loved ones to have regular health exams and medical screenings. Visit MedlinePlus to learn about health screenings for [women](#) and [men](#). Checking in with doctors annually, and possibly more often, depending on overall health, may help reduce risk factors for disease such as high blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Regular check-ups can also help catch concerns early and improve the chances for effective treatment.

Some people visit their doctors routinely, while others avoid these types of appointments at all costs. Here are some ways to support your family members' visits with health care providers:

- Encourage them to reach out to their doctor immediately if they're experiencing pain or any new symptoms.
- Ask about their upcoming visits to doctors, including any specialists. Do they have the appropriate appointments scheduled and marked on a calendar? Do they need any help scheduling appointments?
- Offer to drive them to the appointment, or even go with them and take notes.
- Ask about communication with their health care providers. Are the doctors responsive to their questions?
- Help them [manage medications](#) if needed. Make sure they [maintain a current list of their medications](#), including both prescription and over-the-counter medications and any supplements, and are sharing this list with their health care providers.
- Ask your older family member if they'd feel comfortable allowing you or another family member access to their medical records and permission to talk with their doctors. This could help them stay on top of their appointments and medications.

Find tips to help [prepare for a doctor's appointment](#).

How can I encourage healthy behaviors from afar?

Even if you don't live close to your parents or other aging family members, you can still help promote healthy habits in their lives. Schedule phone calls to check in and ask about their daily meals, how active they are, and if they're taking their medications properly. After your discussion, if needed, you can gently talk with them about ways to incorporate healthier approaches. If your family member uses video technology for visits with health care professionals, you could join them to help take notes and ask questions. If you can't visit your loved ones frequently, ask a trusted family member or friend who is close by to check in on them.

Learn more about [long-distance caregiving](#).

Behavior changes can be difficult and take time. If you're committed to helping your older loved ones adopt healthier lifestyles, try to be patient. If something isn't working right away, stick with it or try a different approach. Your support and encouragement can make a difference!

You may also be interested in

- Learning about [healthy meal planning](#)
- Exploring [vitamins and minerals for older adults](#)
- Finding [tips for getting a good night's sleep](#)

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Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

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