

Top 10 Healthy New Year's Resolutions for Older Adults

Making New Year's resolutions to eat better, exercise, watch your weight, see your healthcare provider regularly, or quit smoking once and for all, can help you get healthier and feel better for many more years to come. The American Geriatrics Society's Health in Aging Foundation recommends these top 10 healthy New Year's resolutions for older adults to help achieve your goal of becoming and staying healthy.

Eat fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, low-fat dairy and healthy fats

In later life, you still need healthy foods, but fewer calories. The USDA's Choose My Plate program (choosemyplate.gov), and your healthcare provider, can help you make good choices.

Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Choose a variety with deep colors: dark green, bright yellow, and orange choices like spinach, collard greens, carrots, oranges, and cantaloupe are especially nutritious. Include nuts, beans, and/or legumes in your daily menu. Choose fiber-rich whole grain bread, brown rice, and whole grain pasta. Pick less fatty meats like chicken or turkey. Have heart-healthy fish, like tuna, salmon, or shrimp, twice a week. Include sources of calcium and Vitamin D to help keep your bones strong. Two daily servings of low-fat milk, yogurt, or cheese are a good way to get these nutrients. Use healthier fats, such as olive and canola oils, instead of butter or lard. Use herbs and spices to add flavor when cooking, which reduces the need to add salt or fat.

Consider a multivitamin

Consult your healthcare provider about any nutrition issues that may need over-the-counter vitamins or nutrition supplements.

Be active

Physical activity can be safe and healthy for older adults—even if you have heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis! In fact, many of these conditions get better with mild to moderate physical activity. Exercises such as tai chi, water aerobics, walking, and stretching can also help you control your weight, build your muscles and bones, and improve your balance, posture, and mood. Check with your insurance plan to see if you are eligible for the SilverSneakers program, which can provide access to local fitness centers.

See your provider regularly

You should schedule an annual Medicare wellness visit with your healthcare provider around your birthday month to discuss health screenings and any changes in your advance directives. Screening tests might include checking your vision, hearing, and for other conditions such as breast cancer, colon cancer, or osteoporosis. At each visit, talk to your provider about all the medications you're taking, and whether or not you still need them. Find out if you should be getting any new or booster immunizations/shots.

Toast with a smaller glass

Excessive drinking can make you feel depressed, increase your chances of falling, cause trouble sleeping, interact with your medications, and can contribute to other health problems. One drink = 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. The recommended limit for older men is 14 drinks per week and for older women, 7 per week.

Guard against falls

One in every three older adults falls each year – and falls are a leading cause of injuries and death among older adults. Exercises such as walking or working out with an elastic band can increase your strength, balance, and flexibility and help you avoid falls. Also ask your healthcare provider to check that you're not taking any pills that can make you more likely to fall. Eliminate items in your home that are easy to trip over, like throw rugs. Insert grab bars in your bathtub or shower, and install night lights so it's easier to see at night.

Give your brain a workout

The more you use your mind, the better it will work. Read. Do crossword puzzles. Try Sudoku. Socializing also gives your brain a boost, so join a bridge club or a discussion group at your local library or senior center. Or take a course at your local community college – some offer free classes for adults 65 and older.

Quit smoking

Did you know that cigarette smokers are twice as likely to develop heart disease as non-smokers? It is never too late to quit. You can still reduce your risk of many health problems, breathe easier, have more energy, and sleep better if you quit smoking. You can access the National Cancer Institute's website (www.smokefree.gov) for resources. Additionally, ask your healthcare provider for help. Don't lose hope if you failed to quit in the past. On average, smokers try about four times before they quit for good.

Speak up when you feel down or anxious

About 1 in 5 older adults suffers from depression or anxiety. Some possible signs of depression can be lingering sadness, tiredness, loss of appetite or pleasure in doing things you once enjoyed. You may also have difficulty sleeping, worry, irritability, and wanting to be alone. If you have any of these signs for more than two weeks, talk to your healthcare provider and reach out to friends and family.

Get enough sleep

Older adults need less sleep than younger people, right? Wrong! Older people need just as much – at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night. Avoid daytime naps, which can keep you up in the evening. Visit the National Sleep Foundation's website (www.sleepfoundation.org) for more tips on how to sleep better.



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