

Growing older in good health

Americans are now living longer than ever. Today, 34 million Americans (1 in 8) are aged 65 or older. Over the next 35 years, this population is expected to more than double.

And as the population grows older, there is increasing concern about maintaining a good quality of life.

A study in the January 26, 2000, issue of JAMA compared the quality of

life among people over the age of 65 in the year prior to their deaths in 1986 or 1993. The researchers found, especially among the oldest men and women, that both men and women had used fewer hospital and nursing home services in the last year of life. They also experienced fewer restrictions from daily activities, and had better mental function and an overall improved quality of life in 1993 than in 1986.

REGULAR MEDICAL CHECKUPS:

Maintaining good health care for any existing medical conditions and regular preventive care are very important to staying healthy as you grow older. In addition to regular screening exams to closely monitor for chronic diseases and conditions, it also is important for older adults to be immunized against influenza, pneumococcal diseases (which include pneumonia), tetanus, and diphtheria.

NUTRITION:

Eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables, grains, and fiber; low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; with moderate amounts of sugar, salt, and sodium. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water each day. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Your need for vitamins and minerals does not decrease with age but most people need 25% fewer calories as they grow older. So make sure the calories you do eat are full of the nutrients you need for a healthy body.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:

Exercise is an important way to help prevent a wide range of health problems. The U.S. Surgeon General published a report in December 1999 that stated that people of all ages can improve the quality of their lives through lifelong moderate physical activity. Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of developing or dying from heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, stroke, and some forms of cancer. It improves balance, muscle and bone strength, flexibility, heart and lung function, and general health that older people need to remain independent and prevent falls and other accidents. Try to accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. These activities can include yard work, gardening, brisk walking, doing household chores, bicycling, dancing, or swimming.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Administration on Aging
National Aging Information Center
330 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201
202/619-0724
202/401-7575 (TTY) or www.aoa.gov
- American Geriatrics Society
212/308-1414 or
www.americangeriatrics.org
- American Dietetic Association
Consumer Nutrition Hot Line
800/366-1655 or www.eatright.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm.



Additional Sources: American Geriatrics Society, American Association of Retired Persons, National Aging Information Center, American Dietetic Association

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