

What is Healthy Aging?

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) defines healthy aging as “the process” of optimizing opportunities for physical, social and mental health to enable seniors to take an active part in society without discrimination and to enjoy independence and quality of life.

The WHO defines Healthy Aging “as the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables “wellbeing in older age”. Functional ability is about having the capabilities that enable all people to be and do what they have reason to value.

Why does this matter?

Many disease conditions and disabilities of later life are connected to lifestyle and behaviors that can be changed.

Because

adopting healthy habits and behaviors, staying involved in your community, using preventive services, managing health conditions and understanding all your medications can contribute to a productive and meaningful life.

- Being more active: research shows that physical activity in older age has multiple benefits, including reduced mortality, improvement of physical and mental capacities and enhanced social outcome. Aim for 30 minutes five times a week or 150 minutes weekly of moderate intensity exercise.
- Improving diet and maintaining a healthy weight. A healthy diet is key to staying well as people age. A healthy diet consists of fruits and vegetables, healthy sources of protein such as beans and legumes chicken and fish, and healthy unsaturated fats. Limit red meat and saturated fat.
- Your brain needs exercise too to keep fit. Exercise your brain by doing mentally challenging new things. Never stop learning.
- Staying socially connected has a powerful effect on health. Enjoy your relationships with family, friends and community. Grow your relationships and friendships with people of all ages. Connect with young people.



Why does this matter? continued

- Sleep promoting habits include regular bedtimes, a quiet and darkened room, relaxation exercises and avoiding stimulants like caffeine. Limit or avoid sleep medications which have significant side effects including increased risks of falls.
- Reduce alcohol consumption: chronic conditions caused by alcohol misuse include liver cirrhosis and increase the risk of the most common forms of dementia such as Alzheimer's and vascular dementia.
- Maintain general health by regular eye examinations, dental visits to maintain good oral health, getting hearing tested and being vaccinated against pneumonia, flu, shingles and tetanus.
- Manage your stress. Learn to relax deeply. Don't "sweat the small stuff". Accept help when needed. Practice positive thinking and emotion exercises.
- Injury prevention. Falls are the most common cause of injury in people over 65 in Canada. Causes are complex. Many falls can be prevented through a mix of behaviors: balance and strength training, installing grab bars and nonslip surfaces, keeping surface cleared of ice and snow. Accept help when you need it.

Key Messages

1. Our health behaviors can have a powerful and positive impact on how we age.
2. How we eat, exercise, socialize, engage with one another and care for ourselves can increase how long we live and delay the onset of disability and disease.
3. We are never too old, and it is not too late to change our health behaviors.

Resources:

Public Health Agency of Canada

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health>

A Women's Guide to Healthy Aging. Seven Proven Ways to Keep You Vibrant, Happy and Strong.

Brown, Vivien, 2017

Administration for Community Living

<https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/news%202016-10/BrainHealthKeyFactsResources.pdf>



What can you do to promote your own health?