

Your tip sheet for better health

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Your doctor has probably talked with you about ways to stay your healthiest as you age. Here's a reminder of some of the healthy habits that can keep you feeling your best.

Stay on top of your physical health



There's no doubt that getting older leads to physical changes. Your metabolism slows, you lose flexibility and strength, and you might have aches and pains. But there is a lot you can do to maintain your health and age well.

Keep up to date with routine visits

Keeping up to date with your preventive care is important to your physical health. Annual wellness visits are a good way to talk with your doctor about your general well-being. During these visits you can get any tests and immunizations you're due for, and check on any chronic health conditions you might have such as diabetes or asthma.

Get a good night's sleep

Many people find that, as they get older, their sleep patterns start to change. This is a natural part of aging. This could include taking longer to fall asleep, having a harder time staying asleep, or just sleeping fewer hours.

Poor sleep can be caused by health problems, certain medicines, and stress brought on by life's changes. There are things you can try that might improve your sleep, such as following a bedtime routine, skipping naps during the day, having no TV or computer in the bedroom, and avoiding mental or physical stimulation an hour or so before going to bed.

Take care of yourself when you're sick or injured

Recovery from illness or injury might take more time than it did when you were younger, but it's worth it. Taking time to rest when you're not feeling well and following advice from your care team can lead to a speedier recovery and improve your overall health.

Choose healthy, nutritious food

Good nutrition is vital in helping you age well. Eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat, high-fiber foods can reduce your risk for certain health conditions including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Remember – as you age, your daily energy needs decrease, so you need fewer calories. Eating lean protein and whole grains can fill you up, and lower cholesterol and blood pressure.

Improve your balance to lower your risk of falling



Many of us are at a higher risk for falling as we age. Falls are a big concern for older adults. They are a major cause of preventable injuries, can take away our independence, and lead to long-term health problems.

Falls don't have to be an expected part of aging. Thankfully, there's a lot we can do to improve our balance and protect ourselves from the danger of falling.

Here are six things you can do right now:

- **Keep walking!** If you feel unsteady, use a trekking or walking stick, a cane, or a walker to help keep your balance and avoid a fall.
- **Start an exercise program to improve your flexibility, balance, and strength.** Consider a Tai Chi or other balance class. Kaiser Permanente members with Medicare Advantage HMO plans have coverage for fitness classes offered by SilverSneakers® and EnhanceFitness®.
- **Review your medicines with your doctor.** Certain medicines, such as sleeping pills, over-the-counter sedatives, and some allergy medicines — especially those that contain Benadryl — can make you sleepy or dizzy. This increases the risk that you will lose your balance and fall. Ask about safer options.
- **Schedule an eye exam,** especially if it's been two years or longer since your last vision test. And make sure your eyeglass prescription is up-to-date. Doing both of these things will help you find any vision problems and correct them so you can see well and avoid falls.
- **Talk to your doctor about getting enough vitamin D.** Vitamin D has been linked to a lower risk of falling. Adults aged 65 and older should get at least 800 IU of vitamin D daily.
- **Make your home safer.** Remove clutter, install railings on stairs and grab bars in the bathroom, and make sure all areas of your home are well lit.



If you already had a fall, tell your doctor.

People who have fallen are at a much greater risk of falling again. There are things your doctor can recommend to lower your risk of another fall.



Walk through your home with the checklist on the next page and see if there are things you can do to make your home safer.

Falls Checklist

Prevent falls by making a few easy changes to your living environment

Did you know that falls are the leading cause of serious injuries for older adults? There are many steps you can take to avoid a fall. Use this checklist as you walk through your home to see if it's set up to keep you from falling. These few changes can make a big difference.



Living spaces

- ☐ Clutter is out of the way, such as stacks of magazines and newspapers.
- ☐ Furniture is arranged so you can move easily through the room.
- ☐ Floor coverings are nonslip and you have nonskid mats under throw rugs.
- ☐ Carpets lie flat on the floor.
- ☐ Carpets with thick, shag-type pile have been removed.
- ☐ Telephone and electrical cords are out of the way.

Bathroom

- ☐ Night light is in your bathroom.
- ☐ Non-slip mats are in bathtub and shower.
- ☐ Sturdy grab bars are next to your bathtub and toilet.
- ☐ Toilet seat is at least 24 inches high. If not, install a raised toilet seat.
- ☐ A seat is in your bathtub or shower to make bathing and showering easier.
- ☐ Bathroom floor has a nonslip finish.

Bedroom

- ☐ Night lights are in your bedroom and hallways.
- ☐ Telephone is near your bed.
- ☐ Flashlight is within easy reach.

Stairways and walkways

- ☐ Stairs are well-lit and free of clutter.
- ☐ Sturdy handrails are on both sides of your stairs.
- ☐ Sidewalks are level and clear of any debris, including leaves, ice, and snow.
- ☐ Wooden steps have a nonslip finish.

Kitchen

- ☐ Cabinets are arranged so that common items are within easy reach.
- ☐ Thin rubber mats are placed in front of the sink and stove.
- ☐ Sturdy step stool is handy so that you can reach items in your cabinets.



Worried about leakage? Get help for incontinence



Believe it or not, leaking urine is a common issue as people get older. If you have any symptoms, there are things you can do to help limit or control this problem. The first step is to talk to your doctor.

Talk to your care team

At a wellness visit, a member of your health care team may ask if you have any symptoms of urinary leakage, also called urinary incontinence. If you have symptoms or any concerns about urinary incontinence, be sure to bring them up. Any leakage is worth talking about with your care team.

Why does leakage happen?

Stress incontinence, usually caused by muscles that have weakened, happens when you laugh or strain. Urge incontinence, which has a number of causes, is related to uncontrolled contractions in your bladder. Men are more likely to have urge incontinence caused by a blockage, sometimes the result of a prostate issue, which can cause urine to overflow around the blockage. Treatment depends on what type of incontinence you have.

What can you do?

For stress or urge incontinence, your doctor may first recommend Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor and sphincter muscles, and bladder training to regain urge control. In addition, there are other things you can do to ease symptoms. Time your intake of fluids for when you'll be near a bathroom, empty your bladder frequently, and use liners or absorbent incontinence underwear if needed. Losing weight and stopping smoking can help, too.

For urge incontinence, recognize what triggers your bladder contractions. For example, if you often have an urge when you drive up to your house, you might try relaxation exercises to train your bladder to wait until you reach the bathroom.

Keep a diary

Keeping a diary can help you and your doctor see patterns and symptoms concerning your incontinence. Keep a daily bladder diary of what you drink, how much you drink, when you go to the bathroom, the amount of an accidental leak, and what you're doing when leakage occurs. Share this diary with your doctor to help decide on the best treatment for you. If behavior changes don't help, medicine or surgery might be an option.

Remember, your doctor can't help you unless the two of you talk. So don't hesitate to bring the topic up during your next visit.

Kegal Exercises for Women

Doing Kegel exercises to strengthen your pelvic floor muscles may help you control urine flow.

First, you need to locate your pelvic muscles so you can pull them inward. To do this, try to stop the flow of urine while sitting on the toilet, or imagine that you're trying to stop passing gas and squeeze the muscles you would use.

Next, do the following using only your pelvic floor muscles. (Don't tighten your stomach, legs, or other muscles, or hold your breath.)

1. Pull the pelvic muscles in and hold for a count of 3.
2. Relax for a count of 3.
3. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

Do these exercises throughout the day while sitting, standing, and lying down. Practice when you feel like you're going to cough, laugh, or any other activity that caused you to leak urine in the past.

Stay active to feel better and live better



With age, we progressively lose muscle tissue and gain body fat, which may lead to loss of function and disability. Strength training builds muscle and reduces fat while increasing strength, endurance, flexibility, and improving balance. It also creates greater bone density, improves blood sugar control, aids with digestion, and helps maintain a healthy blood pressure.

Even a little exercise can lower your risk of health problems. If you haven't been active, walking is a great way to start. Work up to walking 30 minutes a day. And, it doesn't have to be all at once – just add up small walks throughout the day to equal 30 minutes.

With any new activity, it's important to start slowly and add more time or more strenuous activity as you feel able. If you have health concerns, talk with your doctor before you get started.

BALANCE

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Stand on one leg while brushing your teeth.
- Stand with legs apart and lift one leg while balancing on the other, and then shift to the other leg.
- Close your eyes while standing on a pillow or other squishy surface.

HEALTH BENEFITS

- Avoid injuries that are a result of falling.
- Develop a stronger core.
- Improve muscle coordination.

FLEXIBILITY

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Perform regular stretching exercises 2-3 times a week for arms, legs, back, torso, neck. Stretches should be held for 30 seconds. Be mindful to avoid hyperextending your muscles. Just a gentle pull as you stretch is good.

HEALTH BENEFITS

- Improve blood flow to muscles.
- Reduce low back pain.
- Improve joint range of motion.

STRENGTH

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Lift weights or do exercises using resistance bands
- Do exercises that use your body for resistance such as wall pushups or lunges.
- Use a straight-backed chair, and sit down and stand up several times.

HEALTH BENEFITS

- Improve bone health.
- Increase muscle strength.
- Reduce symptoms of chronic conditions such as arthritis and back pain.

ENDURANCE

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Rake leaves or mow your lawn.
- Walk up a long flight of stairs.
- Go dancing or swimming.

HEALTH BENEFITS

- Improve heart and lung capacity.
- Improve your circulatory system.
- Help control weight.

Fitness classes

Consider joining a **fitness class at a local community center or gym**. You can improve your health by exercising with an encouraging group of people and make a few new friends along the way!

SilverSneakers® and **EnhanceFitness®** are fitness classes that meet at participating fitness clubs, senior centers, and community centers in Washington state.

To locate a class near you, go to **kp.org/wa** and enter **"fitness classes"** in the **search box**. These classes are available at no additional cost to Kaiser Permanente Medicare Advantage HMO members.



Mark your activity days on the calendar provided.

Calendar

PLEASE MAKE COPIES TO USE

Track your activity each day
Reminders of appointments

Positive thought for the week
Write down any health concerns you have
for discussion at your next appointment



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY

Your Visit Checklist

Don't worry about forgetting to ask a question or discuss an issue at your next visit. Just fill out this form and take it with you!



Reason for visit: _____

What I need to do or bring to prepare for my visit: _____

Changes in my health since my last visit: _____

Questions about past or upcoming treatments, labs, or test results: _____

Questions about medicines, supplements, or over-the-counter products: _____

Additional concerns I'd like to talk about at my visit: _____

Resources to help you stay on top of your health

Kaiser Permanente Resource Line

Kaiser Permanente members can get information about classes, programs, and other resources both at Kaiser Permanente and in the community. Staff can also mail out printed information on a variety of health topics including healthy eating, managing stress, living with chronic health conditions, and advance directives. Call 1-800-992-2279 between 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on normal business days.

Living Well Workshops

Managing a chronic health condition, such as asthma, diabetes, or chronic pain, can be full of challenges. Our Living Well workshops have helped many people overcome the same challenges you might be facing. Visit our website at kp.org/wa/livingwell or call the Resource Line to learn more about our programs and schedule of workshops, and to register.

Senior Fitness Programs

SilverSneakers and Enhance Fitness are fitness programs offered at no cost to Kaiser Permanente Medicare Advantage HMO members. To locate a class or location near you, call the Resource Line or go to kp.org/wa and enter "fitness classes" in the search box.

Maintain your mental health



It's normal to feel sad about events that many older adults experience, like the loss of independence and loss of friends. You might also feel anxious when things change in your life.

But depression and anxiety are not inevitable as you get older.

Feeling depressed?

Many symptoms of depression are the same regardless of age: loss of interest in activities, changes in appetite, poor self-esteem, and changes in sleep habits. But as you get older, it may be more difficult to identify symptoms of depression. You may notice that you suffer from fatigue or lack of appetite, or that you can't concentrate. Or you may not be able to muster the energy to do daily activities or some of the things you used to enjoy.

If you have symptoms of depression, it's important to talk with your doctor. Depression is often easy to diagnose and treat. Equally important, your doctor can rule out other possible medical causes of your symptoms.

"Many patients are reluctant to speak up because they're not comfortable talking about their feelings," says Doug Kalunian, MD. "We want to assure them that depression is not uncommon, and that it's a condition that can most often be treated successfully."

If depression is not treated, it can have serious consequences. It's not unusual for people with depression to become isolated, malnourished because they have little appetite or eat poorly, or have thoughts of suicide. Your care team can help make sure you get the treatment you need to improve your overall quality of life.

What about anxiety?

Everyone feels nervous or anxious sometimes. However, some anxiety can become more serious. Symptoms may include excessive worry or fear, panic, obsessions, compulsions, and other related feelings. Anxiety becomes a problem when you become so worried — even about routine issues such as riding in an elevator — and the worry is so frequent or intense that it disrupts your daily life.

Symptoms of anxiety may resolve without any treatment, but it can take a very long time. Left untreated, the constant worry or panic symptoms may become debilitating or lead to depression.

Treatment is available

Talk with your doctor if you are feeling anxious, depressed, or have any concerns about your mental well-being. It's important to get treatment if you need it. The most common treatments for depression and anxiety are medication and talk therapy (also called psychotherapy), often used together. There are other options if these don't work for you.



Write a positive thought each week on the calendar provided.

Kaiser Permanente is an HMO plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in Kaiser Permanente depends on contract renewal. This information is not a complete description of benefits. Contact the plan for more information. Limitations, copayments, and restrictions may apply. Benefits may change on January 1 of each year.