



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

RETAINING YOUR INDEPENDENCE: HEALTHY AGING FORMULA FOR SENIORS

It is common knowledge that life expectancy in Canada is increasing. Living long however is most desirable when it is accompanied by living well and healthy. According to statistics gathered in Toronto, 74% of seniors describe their general health is good, very good, or excellent, and 93% say that their mental health is good, very good or excellent¹. And yet, diabetes, dementia, and injuries resulting in emergency visits or hospitalizations are on the rise among those 65 and older (Healthy Aging in Toronto, 2017).

Healthy, or successful aging is an outcome of many factors. Some of those factors are beyond our reach, but there is a path you can follow. It is never too late to adopt healthy behaviour or discard unhealthy ones, become more socially engaged, or reap benefits from more supportive environments².

Let's see the formula for healthy aging!

FIVE FACTORS OF HEALTHY AGING

1. Social connectedness
2. Physical activities
3. Healthy eating for mature bodies
4. Injury prevention
5. Putting down risky habits



THE FIVE FACTORS OF HEALTHY AGING

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Greater social participation is positively associated with self-perceived health and negatively associated with loneliness and life dissatisfaction³. It is also associated with numerous positive health outcomes, such as reduced risk of depression, disability, mortality, and better cognitive health.

One way to continue social connectedness in your senior years is [by staying employed](#). In addition to a larger social network, employment stimulates the mind and keeps cognitive abilities from declining. If this option is not for you, look for an age friendly community you are or can be involved in to generate meaningful connections. A popular activity among seniors is volunteering. The economic value to our communities through seniors volunteering is thought to be over \$60 billion each year⁴. It's a great way to dedicate your time in a meaningful way, help people and economy, and boost your wellbeing.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity is the strongest predictor of health and functioning in later life². Being active can look like a million different things. Going to the YMCA, joining a tai chi class, yoga in the park, going for walks around the neighborhood, hobbies, swimming, are just some things you could do to reap the many benefits of an active body. Regular physical activities enables your brain to form new connections, improve mood and sleep, and lower the risk of chronic disease, disability and falls⁵.

HEALTHY EATING

Eating right influences your physical and cognitive health. According to the Ministry of Health of British Columbia, healthy eating helps adults to remain independent, maintain quality of life, and lowers risk of chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, respiratory disease and some cancers⁶. Here are some general pointers, but speak with your physician to find out what will best serve your body:

- Calcium and Vitamin D strengthen your bones. Find them in fatty fish, seeds, yogurt, and many other products (including fortified ones) or take supplements.
- Vitamin B12 helps to keep your nerve and blood cells healthy. Find them in animal products such as eggs, fish and meats, or fortified breakfast cereal.
- Fiber stimulates intestinal motility. Avoid constipation by consuming fiber-rich foods and enjoy lower cholesterol levels and regulation of blood glucose levels on the side⁷.
- Potassium is your friend for lowering risk of high blood pressure when you increase its levels in addition to decreasing sodium intake. Fruits, vegetables and beans are good sources of potassium. Add flavor to food with herbs and spices and avoid adding salt⁸.
- Consider your fats! Foods low in saturated fats and trans fat help to reduce risk of heart disease. Look for nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil and fish for the good stuff.
- Steer clear of undercooked or raw foods

INJURY PREVENTION

Most common injuries among seniors leading to emergency department visits are fall-related¹, which cost the economy \$2.8 billion a year⁵. To prevent some of potential falls, consider safety proofing your home, a place you spend a significant amount of time in. Here are some ways to do that⁹:

- Upgrade and update your bathroom with safety grab bars next to toilet and shower, non-slip bath mat, and a shower chair
- Clear floor surfaces of hazards such as extension cords, rug corners and clutter, and add a non-slip mat to the bottom of all rugs to reduce tripping
- Cover corners and sharp edges with specially designed padding to avoid bumps or cuts on edges
- Move objects in kitchen cabinets to lower shelves so no one has to reach or climb to get them
- Install lighting that is motion activated. A bonus is that they turn off by themselves!
- If stairs are a problem, consider adding ramps or even a stair lift

PUTTING DOWN RISKY HABITS

About 9% of seniors are cigarette smokers¹⁰. While this number does not seem dramatic, lung cancer is one of the leading causes of death in older adults and cigarette smoking is the most common reason for lung cancer. Excessive drinking among seniors is even higher. Staying tobacco-free and limiting alcohol use are a part of healthy aging and healthy living.

Following our formula for healthy aging and being aware of [services available to seniors in Ontario](#) will lead to greater knowledge that you can act on and share with others, to good physical and mental health, a strong immune system and increased mobility. As with any changes to your lifestyle, it is a good idea to consult a family doctor who knows your

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- ¹⁰ Statistics Canada. (2016). Smoking. Health Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-625-x/2017001/article/54864-eng.htm>

LINK TO OTHER CONTENT

[Delayed retirement article](#)

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/seniors-stay-healthy-and-active>

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