

Family Health Care

# Counselor

80-year-old marathoners. 70-something university students. 60-year-olds eagerly embarking on new careers. The baby boomers—the generation that launched the youth movement—are now questioning and redefining what it means to grow old. Indeed, groundbreaking new research is finding that your birth date has very little to do with your vitality and what you can accomplish later in life.

## Aging Well

This document is intended to be a reliable source of information. However, it is not a substitute for professional advice. We recommend that you consult a physician or a pharmacist to understand how this information applies to any specific care.

[www.family-healthcare.com](http://www.family-healthcare.com)

# Q & A

## Ask Your Helpful FHCP<sup>®</sup> Pharmacist

### Q. Is there a flu vaccine especially designed for older people?

A. Yes. Flu shots designed for seniors contain a higher dose of antigens than the standard-dose vaccine to give better protection against the flu. One study indicated that the high-dose vaccine was 24 percent more effective in preventing flu in adults 65 years of age.

### Q. Is it safe to use a medication after its expiry date?

A. It's not a good idea—particularly if the medication is for a chronic and potentially life-threatening disease such as a heart condition. As well, drugs that require refrigeration (such as amoxicillin suspension) may not have the required potency if used when outdated. Always check the expiration dates on all your unused medications, including over-the-counter and natural remedies to make sure they're all good. If you find that any medication has a strong smell, is powdering or crumbling, or has dried up (as in the case of ointments or creams), you should discard it.

### Q. How do I dispose of medications?

A. Medications—even natural ones—contain chemical components that can get into the water supply or soil, contaminating the environment. There's also concern this contamination could have negative effects on our health over time. So don't flush your expired meds down the toilet or toss them in the garbage. Instead, bring any expired or unused medications to your local pharmacist for proper disposal. Or check with your municipal government office for local waste facilities that accept medications. Just make sure that you scratch out any of your identifying details on the prescription label before dropping off any expired and unused meds.



## General Tips for Aging Well

**Stay active.** It can't be said enough. Being physically active can ward off a host of age-related ailments and help you keep your health and independence as you age. Aim to get at least two-and-a-half hours of physical activity each week such as walking, cycling or swimming.

**Eat a healthy diet.** As you get older, your nutritional needs change. You need fewer calories, but more nutrients. For specific dietary advice for older adults, follow Canada's Food Guide which is available at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca).

**Get enough fibre.** Fibre-containing foods, such as fruits, veggies, whole grains and legumes not only keep you regular, but may also help lower your cholesterol and blood glucose levels. Men over 50 require over 30 grams of fibre each day, while women require 21 grams daily.

**Get enough fluids.** Staying well hydrated is especially important for older people. Being dehydrated can lead to dizziness, fainting and low blood pressure, all of which can put you at a higher risk of falling. Water and herbal teas are all good sources, but try to stay away from sugar-laden sodas and fruit juices, which usually have high calorie counts.

### Checkup Challenge

Most victims of healthcare scams are over 65. So beware of any age-defying miracle products claiming to prolong life and bring back youthful vigour. Check with your doctor or FHCP pharmacist if you have any concerns about a product.

## Ask About Our Preferred<sup>®</sup> Private Label Products

### Next Month's Feature!

APRIL 2016

### Oral Care

A beautiful smile, the ability to chew and grind a vast variety of foods, and a framework for our jawbone. Our teeth give us so much, so it's important not to take them for granted. In fact, research shows that maintaining good dental hygiene—especially with your gums—could lead to better overall health.

In next month's feature find out more about:

- The most common types of dental problems
- Periodontal disease and heart health
- Preventing gum disease
- Dry mouth
- Banishing bad breath
- Bad habits that hurt your teeth
- Denture care

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# Ageing Well

## A New Age of Possibilities

Canada is seeing a major demographic shift with the proportion of seniors in the Canadian population expected to double by 2025. Along with that has come a major shift in mindset of what it means to grow old. Aging well means different things to different people. For some, it's about moving out of their comfort zone to explore new challenges in work, sports or travel. For others, it's about settling into the well-earned comforts of retirement, whether it's gardening or playing with grandchildren.

The age-old question is—what makes some people fight off Father Time better than others?

Science is still trying to figure that out. Eating well, exercising, not smoking, and keeping your blood sugar in check are some of the obvious factors that influence longevity, of course. But one of the longest and most comprehensive studies of aging ever developed, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, found some unexpected clues to aging successfully.

Maintaining strong social relationships was one of them. A happy, stable marriage is ideal, but so are satisfying relationships with close friends, offspring or fellow churchgoers, just to name a few. One theory behind the health benefits of a good social network is that having people in your life can make you feel loved and cared for—which may even boost your immune system! Just having someone listen to your problems can be tremendously therapeutic.

Another surprising contributor to life expectancy is your education level. New research indicates that better educated people tend to live 10 to 14 years longer than the less educated, partly because they have a higher income, smoke less, and are less likely to be overweight.

Of course, defying traditional notions of aging doesn't mean taking your health for granted. Even if you look and feel years younger, you need to be vigilant about getting regular checkups—especially if you have a history of chronic disease in your family. As a senior, you need to make sure you are getting the appropriate medical tests, which include cholesterol screenings, fecal occult blood tests (FOBT), colonoscopies, breast exams, mammograms, and bone density screenings for both genders. It's also a good idea to have your doctor look for unusual moles or skin changes during your physical examination. Even if most of your sun exposure occurred before the age of 18, skin cancers can take 20 or more years to develop.

Bottom line? It's never too late to make lifestyle changes that can get you on the road to aging well, whether it's joining a club, taking night courses, or getting out for a daily walk. More importantly, stay open to new possibilities. As George Burns, who lived to be 100 said, "You have to get older, but you don't have to get old."

## Keeping a Healthy Weight

Is your waistline creeping up with your age? If you're like many people over 50, you've probably noticed that your metabolism isn't burning up calories quite like it used to. Along with too-tight jeans, a bulky midsection can lead to metabolic syndrome and an increased risk of diabetes. Fortunately, there are ways to rev up an older metabolism.

Eating more protein is one of them. That's because protein is the building block of lean muscle mass, and can ward off age-related muscle loss. Cutting back on protein when you diet may leave you thinner, but also flabbier, weaker and less likely to stay active. Keep in mind that animal proteins such as regular ground beef, whole milk and full-fat cheeses will jack up the calorie count. Instead aim for low-fat proteins such as skinless chicken breasts, fish, lentils and beans.

## Sudden Weight Loss

While being trim is a good thing for aging adults, sudden weight loss isn't. Often it can be the first warning sign of a disease like cancer. But there can be other, less ominous reasons for dramatic weight loss—depression, malabsorption syndrome, or hyperthyroidism. In some cases, dental problems and difficulties buying groceries can leave a person underweight and frail.

How much weight loss is considered dangerous in an older person who isn't trying to diet? Experts say as little as 10 pounds over a month should be concerning. If you or your loved one is showing signs of unhealthy weight loss, make sure you see a doctor as soon as possible.

## Hearing Problems

Gradual hearing loss is normal as we age. But our increasingly noisy world is speeding up that process, with some of the biggest aural offenders being common, everyday sounds. Just 30 minutes of loud sounds such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers, power tools, and blenders have the potential to cause permanent hearing loss.

How can you tell if you have hearing trouble? Common signs include consistently losing the thread of conversation in a crowded place, thinking that everyone is mumbling, and having tinnitus, a ringing or hissing in your ears.

Getting tested by an audiologist is the only way to determine if you have hearing loss. But many people are reluctant to go for fear of being prescribed a hearing aid that will make them look like an "old fogey." It may reassure you to know that today's models are flesh-coloured with a barely noticeable wire dropping in the ear.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to prevent noise-induced hearing loss and avoid age-related hearing loss—and simply investing in a good set of earplugs is one of them. Ask your FHCP pharmacist to show you the types that are right for you.



# Aging Well

## Memory Problems

Everyone forgets things from time to time. And after you turn 50, you may notice that you're starting to frequently misplace your glasses or forgetting the names of acquaintances. Don't panic. For most of us, some degree of memory problems is a fairly common part of aging, more annoying than it is serious.

How can you tell if it's becoming one of the more dreaded age-related memory problems such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease? Generally, normal age-related memory loss doesn't significantly interfere with your ability to function in everyday life. For example, if you forget a person's name, you may recall it later in the day. That said, memory loss is often the first sign of dementia. Early signs may include:

- repeatedly asking the same questions
- forgetting common words when speaking
- misplacing items in inappropriate places, such as putting a wallet in the refrigerator
- becoming less able to follow directions, including familiar recipes

The good news is that most types of dementia and Alzheimer's disease are not inherited. So if your grandfather succumbed to the disease, it doesn't necessarily mean you'll get it yourself and pass it on to your children. If you're concerned about memory loss, see your doctor. He or she can evaluate the cause and degree of your memory impairment and whether it's reversible.

## Boosting Your Brain Power

Not surprisingly, the old adage "use it or lose it" is your best strategy for maintaining optimal brain health. Whether it's reading books, attending cultural events or playing games like chess, research shows that mentally-stimulating activities can help ward off age-related mental decline.

It's important, too, to balance your cerebral pursuits with activity. One study showed that people who exercised regularly retained more grey matter—the part of the brain that manages speech and memory—than their couch-potato peers. One reason is that exercise increases blood flow, delivering oxygen and glucose to the brain, while at the same time reducing the build-up of damaging plaques. The feel-good chemicals that exercise releases can also help you stay in a positive frame of mind. Almost any type of physical activity will do, from biking, swimming, dancing or just taking a daily walk.

Last but not least, be a fathead. Why? Our brain cell membranes are made of fatty acids and as we age, they can become more rigid and susceptible to inflammation. Eating good fats—the kinds found in salmon, tuna, avocado and nuts—can help keep these membranes flexible so they can keep transmitting signals between brain cells effectively. Try to eat fish at least twice a week, but limit albacore tuna to no more than 6 ounces a week to minimize mercury exposure.

## Helping the Medicine Go Down

It's a well-known fact that older people take more medications than their younger counterparts. Some experts put the number at four to eight drugs a day to treat any number of acute and chronic conditions.

Let's say you're taking five different drugs a day, for example. That's five potentially different dosing schedules, side effects, and interactions with foods, just to name a few. So it's not surprising that half the people who take prescription drugs use them incorrectly. People taking drugs for diabetes, hypertension or cardiovascular disease are most susceptible to making mistakes. And the older people get, the risk for making mistakes goes up.

Failing eyesight, for example, can make a label unreadable. As well, a hearing loss may cause misunderstanding of a medication schedule. Then there's the physiological fact that an aging body can't eliminate the drug as quickly as when it was younger, so it's more susceptible to the side effects of medications. This is why it's crucial that older people reach out to their FHCP pharmacist.

As a medication expert, your FHCP pharmacist is there to make sure you truly understand how your medicines go down. He or she can assess all your medications (including natural health and non-prescription products) for potential interactions and risks, and advise you on the right—and wrong—ways to take them.

It's also a good idea to keep your patient profile on one pharmacy database as you get older—your age, chronic illnesses, allergies and so on. That way if your rheumatologist prescribes one drug, your dentist another, and your family doctor another, your pharmacist can play a coordinating role between them.

Remember—the more you know about your medications, the more you can safely take them to get the desired effect with minimal problems.



# Your Family Health Care Pharmacy

MARCH 2016



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