Much of your health as you age is dependent upon your lifestyle and the choices you make. By focusing on protecting both your body and your brain, you can identify where to take preventive interventions. Preventive health care planning can be a powerful component of your healthy aging strategy.
Managing Your Risk Factors

Nearly everyone over the age of 65 will develop one or more chronic medical conditions and aging is the leading risk factor for most of them. Research shows many of these conditions have modifiable risk factors. Diagnosing them early provides the opportunity to intervene, influence, delay or manage these conditions to minimize their impact on your health and quality of life.

Regular screening tests provide a snapshot of your current health. Since screening tests often detect problems at an early stage, you can maximize your potential for long-term health. Early detection is frequently the key to successful treatment.

Physical changes as you age can make driving a risk factor too. Actions like turning your head to look for oncoming traffic or braking safely can become challenging. Age-related vision problems can make it difficult to see clearly or drive at night. So manage your risk. If you are having challenges driving safely, find other means of transportation or only drive under optimal conditions.

Prevention Starts at Home

Physical changes, health conditions and some medications make falls more likely as you grow older. Unfortunately, falls are a leading cause of injury among older adults. Problems with balance, which affect the vast majority of people as we age, increase the risk of falls and fracture. Certain exercises can help improve balance. In addition, you likely have many health hazards in your own home that can put you at risk for a fall. By making simple changes, you can drastically decrease your potential fall risk.

Do not walk around the house in your stocking feet. Socks do not provide you with any stability on a slippery floor. Remove rugs and carpet runners or securely fasten them to the floor. Install grab bars in your shower or tub. Use nonslip mats too. Be careful on your stairs when you are carrying a load of laundry. Install a second handrail for added security.

Practicing prevention means taking an objective look at your living environment. Take extra precautions or ask for help. Your health and safety could depend on it.

Build Your Prevention Team

You can also incorporate the strategic use of preventive services into your plan for healthy aging. These services can provide the information you need to slow down the natural progression of aging or a chronic condition so you can minimize its impact on your daily life.

Besides your physician, there are other advisors who can provide you with support for your preventive care plan. You can utilize the services of fitness professionals, wellness coaches and/or nutritional counselors. Participating in a carefully monitored exercise program may help improve your balance, flexibility, muscle strength and gait. Nurses can provide you with education about your health issues. Your prevention team can offer insight about how to more effectively manage your aging transitions. Your prevention team can assist in developing your plan to manage your aging risks and vulnerabilities. They can provide ideas on how to adapt your environment. They can offer tips and show you how incorporating the use of resources or tools can optimize the safety of your living environment.

Final Thoughts

Ensuring you have a healthy retirement requires that you practice prevention to minimize your risks and bring the right resources into your life. Rather than making a fuss about it, focus on implementing the little changes that can keep you healthy and safe. You, and your children, will be relieved and more confident in your ability to continue to live independently.
Frailty is decline in multiple body systems that leads to greater likelihood of poor health outcomes. While one’s age contributes to frailty, multiple other factors including lifestyle choices, medical conditions, and genetics, play a role. Frailty symptoms include low muscle strength, impaired balance, slow walking speed, fatigue and poor appetite. Regular physical activity can delay frailty onset or slow its progression. A few minutes of moderate activity (like walking) each day can have positive impact. More is even better. Despite this, your body will change as time goes by. Medications that made sense in the past may no longer offer benefit, or lead to risk of harm, including falls. Review your medications with your doctor and cut back where possible. Being on fewer medications is often associated with better function and quality of life. Remember that age is more than a number. There are steps you can take to improve or maintain your function, even as your age increases.

Expert Insight

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Take Action Now

• Get preventive screening tests. Check with your health care provider to determine what tests you should have.

• Seek Resources. Make an appointment with a fitness professional at Charter House or the Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center to identify how to enhance your preventive care plan.

• Implement a fall prevention plan. Inventory your home and remove any potential hazards. Install bathroom grab bars for added security. Look at the side effects of your medications to identify those that may increase your risk of falling.

• Wear sensible shoes. Change your footwear to properly fitting, sturdy shoes with nonskid soles.

• Update your driving skills. Take a refresher course for older drivers. Look for courses through a community education program or local organizations that serve older adults.

• Review your medications. Go over all your medications with your doctor to determine if you can eliminate or cut back on any of them.

GOAL: Identify one risk factor you have for falling in your home and remove it.