

# Patient & Family Education Handout Care of Elderly



## Introduction

Every person – in every country in the world – should have the opportunity to live a long and healthy life. Environments are highly influential on our behavior and our exposure to health risks (for example, air pollution or violence), our access to services (for example, health and social care) and the opportunities that ageing brings.

Ageing increases the risk of chronic diseases such as dementias, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, and cancer. These are the nation's leading drivers of illness, disability, death, and health care costs. The risk of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias increases with age, and these conditions are most common in adults 65 and older.

## Who are elderly age group?

Ageing, an inevitable process, is commonly measured by chronological age and, as a convention, a person aged 65 years, or more is often referred to as 'elderly'.

## What are Factors influencing healthy aging?

Although some of the variations in older people's health are genetic, most is due to people's physical and social environments – including their homes, neighborhoods, and communities, as well as their personal characteristics – such as their gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

heart diseases, etc. The risk of getting diabetes increases as one ages. In fact, adults aging 65 or older are at a greater risk of becoming diabetic.

Maintaining healthy behaviors throughout life, particularly eating a balanced diet, engaging in regular physical activity and refraining from tobacco use, all contribute to reducing the risk of non-communicable diseases, improving physical and mental capacity, and delaying care dependency.

## Common Health Problems in the Elderly and ways to manage them right

### 1. Heart disease:

Aging can cause changes in the heart and blood vessels, increasing the chances of heart disease. Ways to prevent and manage heart-related ailments in elderly include:

- Keeping check and restricting the intake of bad fats (trans fats and saturated fats).
- Motivating to quit smoking
- Exercising at least 20-30 minutes every day
- Limiting daily salt intake to reduce sodium consumption

### 2. Diabetes:

a condition that results in an inability to process sugar by your body. High blood sugar can have serious long-term effects on the health and can also lead to kidney disease,

heart diseases, etc. The risk of getting diabetes increases as one ages. In fact, adults aging 65 or older are at a greater risk of becoming diabetic.

#### **Ways to prevent and manage diabetes in elderly include:**

- Avoiding a sedentary lifestyle and keeping active in day-to-day routine
- Reducing carb and unhealthy fats in the diet
- Testing for blood sugar levels from time to time
- Taking medicines (and not skipping any dose) as advised by your doctor

### **3. Dehydration:**

This means that your body lacks enough levels of fluids. Absence of adequate body fluids can have an adverse impact on your health, particularly in old age, because it can be linked to other serious problems like urinary tract infections, electrolyte imbalance, etc.

#### **Ways to prevent and manage dehydration in the elderly:**

- Drinking at least 3 liters of water every day.
- People with heart failure need to be watchful of excess water intake.
- Limiting the intake of fluid-depleting drinks like caffeinated beverages
- Taking more fruits, herbal teas, etc.

### **4. Chronic constipation:**

Not able to defecate properly and feeling full is a fairly common problem in elderly. This might not have any immediate serious implication, but when it becomes frequent and severe, it can lead to troublesome issues such as bloating, indigestion, nausea, and stomach pain. The major cause of constipation can be as simple as a lack of physical activity and fiber in diet.

#### **Ways to prevent and manage constipation in elderly:**

- Including more fruits and green leafy vegetables in the diet to consume more roughage
- Keeping well-hydrated
- Exercising regularly to maintain healthy bowel movements
- Seeking doctor help if the lifestyle changes do not help

### **5. Condition related to mental health:**

Like physical health, mental health tends to deteriorate with age. Elderly people are likely to develop Alzheimer's disease, depression, and anxiety.

#### **Ways to cope with most of these mental health problems need a customized approach, however, following steps can help in a generalized manner:**

- Staying connected with neighbors, family, and friends.
- Picking up a new hobby like gardening, knitting, pottery, etc.
- Journaling to keep a check on feelings and emotions

## 6. Bone and Joint related disorders:

Conditions such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and muscle aches are common in elderly. In fact, arthritis affects almost half of all people of age 65 and older. Bone and joint related disorders can have a massive impact on the quality of life as they affect your participation in daily activities.

**Ways to manage symptoms related to bone, muscle and joint-related conditions in elderly include:**

- Participating in physical activities within your range of movements
- Taking enough of calcium and vitamin D rich foods to never fall short of these nutrients
- Ensuring to get enough sun
- Including various anti-inflammatory foods in the daily diet such as nuts, seeds, fatty fishes like salmon, etc.
- Getting tested for arthritis and related conditions as and when advised by your doctor
- Having fall support in bathrooms to avoid any accidental fall

## 7. Falls:

Some health conditions, medications and footwear can affect ability to stay steady on your feet. You might not notice your health changing as it can happen gradually, so it's important to have regular checkups so any issues can be picked up before they cause a fall.

**Ways to prevent fall:**

- Stay active
- Eat well
- Keep hydrated
- Get your eyes and glasses checked regularly
- Check for hearing problems
- Choose right shoes
- Rugs and mats at the top or bottom of the stairs are a trip hazard and can easily lead to a fall, so it's a good idea to move them out of the way.
- Install a night light near the bed to make sure if you wake up in the night you can see where you're going. You can install a motion-activated light that comes on as needed.
- Remove trip hazards like trailing wires, clutter and rugs. Also, try and avoid glass furniture as it can be harder to see and may cause a stumble.
- Avoid getting up suddenly after setting or from the bed to avoid the blood pressure dropping too much (called postural hypotension) that causes loss of balance.

**It's not how old you are, it's how you are old**