SENIOR HEALTH GUIDE
INTRODUCTION
MedicineNet.com's Role as Educator

"An integral role of the doctor caregiver is one of educator....teaching patients and family members about their bodies, health, and illness as well as complications, prognosis, and potential side effects of therapies is a characteristic of being a doctor... without question MedicineNet.com allows patients and families to acquire higher levels of knowledge about these health concerns, each at their own pace...this affords patient understanding, comfort about decision-making processes, and satisfaction about self-empowerment related to their own, friends' and family members' health."

William Shiel Jr., M.D., F.A.C.P.
Chief Medical Editor, MedicineNet.com

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Senior Health: Successful Aging

- As people get older, physiological changes occur in their body as a natural part of aging.
- Physical changes due to aging can occur in almost every organ and can affect seniors' health and lifestyle.
- Some diseases and conditions become more prominent in the elderly.
- Psychosocial issues can play a role in physical and mental health of older adults.
- A balanced diet and regular exercise are strongly linked to better health outcomes in seniors.
- A series of routine screening tests and preventive measures are recommended.
- Important preventive measures at home can improve the safety and health of seniors.
- Geriatrics is a medical subspecialty dedicated to the care of the elderly. Physicians who have specialized training in this field are known as geriatricians.

Top 15 Diseases and Conditions Seniors Encounter

Medical problems in the elderly can involve any organ system in the body. Most conditions result from decreased function or degeneration of the involved organ. Most commonly encountered medical conditions in seniors based on organ system are listed below:

1. Musculoskeletal: **osteoarthritis** (inflammation of joints due to wear and tear), **osteoporosis** (bone loss), **gout**, loss of muscle mass, fractures.
2. Hormonal: diabetes (impaired control of blood glucose), **menopause**, thyroid dysfunction, high blood cholesterol, slower overall metabolism.
3. Neurologic: dementia (Alzheimer or other types), Parkinson's disease, strokes, poor vision, hearing impairment, balance problem.
5. Cardiovascular disease: heart attacks, congestive heart failure, irregular heart rhythm (atrial fibrillation), high blood pressure (hypertension), **atherosclerosis** (hardening and narrowing of blood vessels) and peripheral vascular disease or peripheral artery disease (poor blood flow as a result of narrow blood vessels).
6. **Lungs**: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), loss of lung volume.

7. **Kidneys**: poor kidney function (kidney or renal disease) from long standing diabetes and hypertension.

8. **Skin and Hair**: hair loss, dry skin, itching, infections.

9. **Cancers**: prostate, colon, lung, breast, skin, bladder, ovary, brain, pancreas, only to name a few.

10. **Bone marrow and immune system**: inability to produce sufficient blood cells (anemia, myelodysplasia).

11. **Gastrointestinal**: stomach ulcers, diverticulosis (small pockets forming in the wall of colon), colon inflammation or colitis from infection or ischemic (poor blood flow), swallowing difficulty (dysphagia), constipation, bowel incontinence, hemorrhoids.

12. **Urinary**: urinary incontinence, urinary urgency, difficulty urinating.


14. **Infections**: urinary tract infection, pneumonia, skin infection, shingles, colon infection (diverticulitis, colitis).

15. **Psychiatric**: depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, insomnia.

Read about the above diseases with the complete Senior Health article: http://www.medicinenet.com/senior_health/article.htm

REFERENCES:
MedicineNet.com. Senior Exercise
MedLinePlus.gov. Seniors’ Health
NIHSeniorHealth.gov

**Senior Exercise: Feel the Benefits**

Since muscle mass decreases as people age, it's important for older adults to exercise, as it keeps seniors strong, helps to burn calories and maintain weight, improves flexibility, and it contributes to balance and bone strength. Exercise has even been proven to help cognitive function and improve mood in adults over 55 years of age.

For those of us who might be concerned with quality of life as we age, exercise is one of the keys. Is it ever too late to start? Research proves it's not. Learn the benefits of exercising into old age and get some tips on how to get started no matter how old you are.

- Beginning in the fourth decade of life, adults lose 3%-5% of muscle mass per decade
- Muscle mass can increase at any age in response to exercise
- Muscle patterning improves within days of starting a weight-lifting program, even without any increase in muscle mass
• Men and women who walked 30 minutes or more per day live longer than those who walk less than 30 minutes

• Seniors show improvements in function when they engage in exercise programs that involve stretching exercises

• Physical activity improves balance and reduces the risk of falling

• The special brain cells that help you think, move, perform all the bodily functions that keep you alive, and even help your memory, all increase in number after just a few days or weeks of regular activity

• Exercise alleviates symptoms of depression

How much exercise do you need for health and fitness?
The American College of Sports Medicine and American Heart Association recently published guidelines for physical activity in older adults. Here is a summary of the recommendations.

• **Aerobic exercise** (walking, jogging, dancing, biking, swimming, etc.): To promote and maintain health, older adults need moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity for a minimum of 30 minutes five days each week or vigorous intensity aerobic activity for a minimum of 20 minutes three days each week. (Moderate intensity is when you feel "warm and slightly out of breath," and vigorous is when you feel "out of breath and sweaty."

• **Resistance exercise** (weight lifting, calisthenics): To promote and maintain health and physical independence, older adults will benefit from performing activities that maintain or increase muscular strength and endurance for a minimum of two days each week. It is recommended that eight to 10 exercises be performed on two or more nonconsecutive days per week using the major muscle groups.

• **Flexibility exercise**: To maintain the flexibility necessary for regular physical activity and daily life, older adults should perform activities that maintain or increase flexibility at least two days each week for at least 10 minutes each day.

• **Balance exercise**: To reduce risk of injury from falls, older adults with substantial risk of falls (for example, with frequent falls or mobility problems) should perform exercises that maintain or improve balance.

Read full article:
http://www.medicinenet.com/senior_exercise/article.htm
Senior Sex

People seem to want and need to be close to others. As we grow older, many of us also want to continue an active, satisfying sex life. But the aging process may cause some changes.

Normal aging brings physical changes in both men and women. These changes sometimes affect the ability to have and enjoy sex. A woman may notice changes in her vagina. As a woman ages, her vagina can shorten and narrow. Her vaginal walls can become thinner and also a little stiffer. Most women will have less vaginal lubrication. These changes could affect sexual function and/or pleasure. Talk with your doctor about these problems.

As men get older, impotence (also called erectile dysfunction - ED) becomes more common. ED is the loss of ability to have and keep an erection for sexual intercourse. ED may cause a man to take longer to have an erection. His erection may not be as firm or as large as it used to be. The loss of erection after orgasm may happen more quickly, or it may take longer before another erection is possible. ED is not a problem if it happens every now and then, but if it occurs often, talk with your doctor.

What causes sexual problems as we age?

Some illnesses, disabilities, medicines, and surgeries can affect your ability to have and enjoy sex. Problems in your relationship can also affect your ability to enjoy sex.

Some sexual problem causes include:

- Arthritis
- Chronic Pain
- Diabetes
- Heart Disease
- Incontinence
- Stroke

Get answers to these senior sex questions:

- What else may cause sexuality problems?
- Am I too old to worry about safe sex?
- Can emotions play a part?
- What can I do to have an active sex life as I age?

Plus, Learn About the Foods That Will Bump Your Libido! Read the full article: http://www.medicinenet.com/senior_sex/article.htm
Heart Disease Quiz

Q: If you have a heart attack, you also have heart disease.

True or False?
A: True.

If you have a heart attack, you have heart disease. Heart disease includes a number of conditions affecting the structures or function of the heart. Common forms of heart disease are coronary artery disease, arrhythmias, heart failure, and congenital heart disease, among many others that may lead to development of a heart attack.

Q: Heart disease is the leading cause of death of American women over the age of 25.

True or False?
A: True.

According to the American Heart Association, cardiovascular disease is the leading killer of women over the age of 25. It kills nearly twice as many women in the United States than all types of cancer, including breast cancer.

Q: The term "heart failure" means the heart has stopped working.

A: False

The term "heart failure" does not mean the heart has "failed" or stopped functioning. It means the heart does not pump as well as it should. This then leads to salt and water retention, causing edema (swelling) and shortness of breath, which are the primary symptoms of heart failure.

Take the Heart Disease Quiz:
http://www.medicinenet.com/heart_disease_quiz/quiz.htm
Senior Sex

As we age, most people desire the need to be close to others. Moreover, as we approach the "golden years" many of us also want to maintain satisfying, active physical and sexual relationships. Unfortunately, the aging process also may cause some undesirable changes in our bodies. The normal aging process brings many physical changes in both men and women. As we age we also sometimes develop conditions that may require medications. These changes and obstacles can sometimes affect one's ability to enjoy a healthy sexual relationship with another person.


Related Slideshows

Exercise for Successful Aging

You can change how you think, feel, and act when you are older simply by changing how you think, feel, and act now. Watch this slideshow on senior exercise for healthy and successful aging and learn how to get started no matter how old you are.

http://www.medicinenet.com/healthy_seniors_pictures_slideshow_exercise_aging/article.htm

23 Ways to Avoid Caregiver Burnout

About 66 million Americans are caring for parents, spouses, children, or other relatives. Watch this slideshow on how to avoid caregiver burnout by using pets, music, pill organizers, and webcams, make caregiving a little easier.

http://www.medicinenet.com/caregiver_burnout_pictures_slideshow/article.htm

18 Secrets for a Longer Life

Learn how to increase your longevity by following these tips such as making friends, healthy eating, stress management and more. Watch this slideshow to learn 18 secrets for a longer life.

http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/ss/slideshow-longer-life-secrets
Patient Comments: Senior Sex

How have you and/or your partner worked to improve your sex life as you age?

Comment from: jetjon, 75 or over Male (Patient) Published: September 25
My wife had lost all interest in sex for the past ten years. A year ago we both started attending an aerobic exercise class three times a week. We both lost weight and I no longer use any alcohol. The interest in sex has returned, and we both discovered the joy of oral sex, which we seldom tried in our 42 years of marriage. I may have to start using a Viagra-type helper to keep up with the wife, but senior sex is worth the effort.

Related Reading: senior sex

Have you found your sex drive has decreased as you have aged?

Comment from: honey, 65-74 Male (Patient) Published: November 16
I'm 68 and have had a low libido problem for years. I thought it was a normal part of aging, but my wife harped at me to go to the doctor. Eventually I went and found out through blood tests that I had the testosterone of an 85 year old man. He prescribed a cream for me to rub on my legs and within a few days I noticed I was waking up with an erection every day and thinking about sex like I did when I was in my 20's. I haven't had such good sex in years. I think every guy that has this problem to ask for a testosterone blood test.

Related Reading: senior sex

Comment from: smileybaby, 65-74 Female (Patient) Published: October 04
As I aged especially after retiring I have found my sex drive has increased. I am 67 and these last 2 years have been hard for me. I for the first time got a vibrator and use it regularly. I should tell you my husband died of cancer 2 yrs ago and for about 3 years, we didn't have any type of sexual relationship. I have even purchased a book called "Sex after 60. It opened my eyes and I think I talk more easily about what I want in a sexual relationship. I am more open now than before.

Related Reading: senior sex; cancer

Comment from: kricket, 55-64 Female (Patient) Published: September 02
Quite the opposite-- a widow for 2 years, and then I found the most remarkable man. We plan entire afternoons based around a movie and bedroom time. Sex is marvelous, I had no idea what my body would do, and the time is not rushed or frantic. The relaxation is wonderful, no stress of pregnancy, or kids barging in. I can't believe it-- 5 hours? Never before had I ever experienced this bliss.

Related Reading: senior sex; stress; pregnancy

View all Comments:
Suggested Reading on Senior Health (Successful Aging) by Our Doctors

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Related Diseases &amp; Conditions</th>
<th>81 articles</th>
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<tr>
<td>◇ Low Blood Pressure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Low blood pressure, also referred to as hypotension, is blood pressure that is so low that it causes symptoms or signs due to the low flow of blood through</td>
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<tr>
<td>◇ Anemia</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ Anemia is the condition of having less than the normal number of red blood cells or less than the normal quantity of hemoglobin in the blood. The oxygen-carrying</td>
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<tr>
<td>◇ Lower Back Pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>◦ There are many causes of back pain. Pain in the low back can relate to the bony lumbar spine, discs between the vertebrae, ligaments around the spine and</td>
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<td>◇ Gallstones</td>
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More on MedicineNet:

http://www.medicinenet.com/senior_health/focus.htm

Suggested Reading on Senior Health Across the WebMD Network

Healthy Aging on WebMD.com
http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/default.htm

Senior Health Center on MedicineNet.com
http://www.medicinenet.com/senior_health/focus.htm

Healthy Living Center on eMedicineHealth.com
http://www.emedicinehealth.com/healthy-living/center.htm

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