

# The 8 Most Important Ways to Stay Healthy and Prevent Disease

**1 Don't Smoke.** If you do smoke, talk to your doctor about quitting. You can also help yourself by following tips on websites ([www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov)) or talking with someone at the National Quitline (1-800-QUITNOW). There are additional resources available at [www.healthfinder.gov/](http://www.healthfinder.gov/); search for "smoking" once you've accessed the site. Smoking is a major preventable risk factor that is associated with early death. Common causes are emphysema, lung disease, and heart disease.

**2 Be Physically Active.** Walking briskly, mowing the lawn, dancing, swimming, and bicycling are just a few examples of moderate physical activity. If you are not already physically active, start small and work up to 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity most days of the week.

**3 Eat a Healthy Diet.** Emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; eat foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.

**4 Stay at a Healthy Weight.** Balance calories from foods and beverages with calories you burn off by your activities. To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.

**5 Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation.** If you drink alcohol, have no more than two drinks a day. A standard drink is one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

**6 Get The Screening Tests Recommended for You.**

**BLOOD PRESSURE:** Have your blood pressure checked at least every 2 years.

High blood pressure is 140/90 or higher. Successful treatment will prevent heart disease and stroke.

**BODY MASS INDEX (BMI):** Have your body mass index calculated to screen for obesity. BMI is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. You can also calculate your own BMI by using the BMI calculator on the website for the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute ([www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/)).

**CHOLESTEROL:** Have your cholesterol checked regularly starting at age 35. If you are younger than 35, talk to your doctor about whether to have your cholesterol checked if:

- You have diabetes
- You have high blood pressure
- Heart disease runs in your family
- You smoke

**COLORECTAL CANCER:** Have a test for colorectal cancer starting at age 50. Your doctor can help you decide which test is right for you. If you have a family history of colorectal cancer, you may need to be tested earlier.

**DEPRESSION:** Your emotional health is as important as your physical health. If you have felt "down", sad, or hopeless over the last two weeks or have felt little interest or pleasure in doing things, you may be depressed. Talk to your doctor about being screened for depression.

**DIABETES:** Have a test for diabetes if you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol. If you are diabetic, tight glucose control is very important. Maintaining HbA1c less than 7.0 will reduce vascular, heart, and kidney disease as well as blindness and nerve damage.

**PROSTATE SCREENING:** Discuss the risks and benefits of this test with your personal physician.

**SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED**

**INFECTIONS:** Talk to your doctor to see whether you should be tested for gonorrhea, syphilis, Chlamydia, or other sexually transmitted infections.

Talk to your doctor about an **HIV screening** if you:

- Have had sex with men since 1975
- Have had unprotected sex with multiple partners
- Have used or now use injection drugs
- Exchange sex for money or drugs or have sex partners who do
- Have past or present sex partners who are HIV-infected, are bisexual, or use injection drugs
- Are being treated for sexually transmitted diseases
- Had a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1985.

**7 Take Preventive Medications If You Need Them.**

**ASPIRIN:** Ask your doctor about taking aspirin to prevent heart disease if you are:

- Older than 45;
- Younger than 45 and also:
  - a) Have high blood pressure
  - b) Have high cholesterol
  - c) Have diabetes
  - d) Smoke

**8 Stay Up-to-Date with Your Immunizations.**

Even as an adult you need to keep up-to-date with your immunizations.

**FLU:** Have a flu shot every year starting at age 50. If you are younger than 50, ask your doctor whether you need a flu shot.

**PNEUMONIA:** Have a pneumonia shot once after you turn 65. If you are younger, ask your doctor whether you need a pneumonia shot.

**Sources:** Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Fact Sheet "Men: Stay Healthy at Any Age – Your Checklist for Health", based on research findings from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). Prostate screening recommendation from American Cancer Society.