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### **Importance of Regularly Scheduled Maintenance**

You know it's important to change the oil in your car on a regularly scheduled basis, but did you also know that it's worth just as much to see your doctor for regular checkups and routine exams?

Start by talking with your doctor about your family history. If, for example, high blood pressure or diabetes runs in your family, your doctor can recommend a series of tests to determine the likelihood of you falling victim to the same disease. When caught early enough, many of these things are treatable, and are merely hindrances. If left unchecked, they can cause grave danger.

The AARP's webpage about staying healthy is very helpful: [http://www.aarp.org/health/staying\\_healthy/prevention/a2003-03-14-prevent.html](http://www.aarp.org/health/staying_healthy/prevention/a2003-03-14-prevent.html).

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### **Exercise**

At this stage in your life, it's important that you check with a doctor before beginning a regular exercise program. Once you've been given the go-ahead, find something that you like to do, either a year-round activity or different ones for different seasons.

While many types of exercise exist that will give you great benefits, it's

not a good idea to overdo it, especially the first time around. Make sure you monitor how you're feeling as you progress, and stop exercising if you're in pain.

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#### **Kinds of Exercise**

Some easy, basic exercises that are readily available and don't cost much are walking and bicycling, or swimming at your local pool. If you live in an urban area, you can easily begin incorporating exercise into your daily routine by doing things such as walking to the store or around the block instead of taking a car. You can ride your bicycle next time you want to go to the park, or spend some time in a paddle boat if you live around a lake.

The American Heart Association recommends that you “pick rhythmic, repetitive activities that challenge the circulatory system, and exercise at an intensity appropriate for you.”

Want more info? Simply go to <http://216.185.112.5/presenter.jhtml?identifier=814>.

If you live alone and are ready for ways to meet new people, joining a gym or community center may be right for you. They tend to offer a variety of different classes and programs that you may be interested in, ranging from yoga to dance to step aerobics. Check your local community bulletin or Chamber of Commerce for more information.

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**Weight Algorithms**

If you're concerned about your weight for your body type, check out the weight-to-height chart, which gives you comparable averages, at <http://seniorhealth.about.com>. This handy guide tells you whether you fall between or outside of typical weight ranges for your height, and is surrounded by links to other useful resources for seniors. See also <http://www.revolutionhealth.com>.

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**Diet Basics**

As you age, your energy requirements decrease. You still need nutrients, though, which is why it's important to keep a careful eye on what you eat. If you're looking for some guidance on what's best for your body, check out the food pyramid, at: <http://elkhorn.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1083/build/#Pyramid>.

If you have a medical condition which warrants a drastic change in your eating habits, talk with your doctor about creating a meal plan that's right for you. He or she will know how to help you select foods that taste good and will help you stay healthy and fit.

For some basic information on how to eat better as you age, look at <http://www.aging.ny.gov/health/nutrition/index.cfm>.

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**Supplements**

Now is a good time to talk with your doctor about taking supplements. He or she will typically suggest some calcium, vitamin B12 and vitamin D supplements.

If you've heard of a supplement that seems miraculous, do some research before you buy it. There are many programs targeted to tempt seniors in particular to part with their money, and you don't want to fall prey to an unscrupulous vendor. Not all remedies are regulated the same way, and just because something claims to be "natural" doesn't necessarily mean that it would be good for you.

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**Prescription Safety**

You wouldn't think so, but each year, "243,000 older Americans end up in the hospital because of reactions caused by combining over-the-counter and prescription medicines," according to AARP. It's strange, because we tend to think only of interactions between prescription medication. But that's not always the case, and it's better to be safe than sorry.

Since most older Americans take at least four prescription drugs per day, it's easy to inadvertently mix substances that don't belong together. On your next trip to the drug store, be sure and ask your pharmacist about the possibility of undesired interactions between your current medication and any over-

the-counter drugs (including herbal supplements).

In general, it's a good idea to keep a list of current medications next to your pills. Always be sure your family members and health professionals are all aware of your prescriptions, so they can help you manage them. Keep your pills in a spill-proof container, so they don't become dirty or damaged.