



Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!



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Checkups: Early Prevention

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It is important to have regular checkups as you age and especially important to get your blood pressure, blood sugar, eyes, ears, and cholesterol checked. The risk for several chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension increases as you get older, but it is possible to prevent or at least detect early some of these diseases if you get regular checkups and screenings.

HEART DISEASE

Heart disease continues to be the leading

cause of death in men and



women. Coronary heart disease (CHD) is narrowing of the blood vessels that supply oxygen and blood to the heart. CHD is usually caused by atherosclerosis, which occurs when fat and plaque build up in your artery walls and causes your arteries to narrow. Narrowing of your arteries could cause you to have a heart attack. Having elevated cholesterol (LDL greater than 100 mg/dL) and blood pressure (greater than 120/80 mmHg) puts you at greater risk for

heart disease. High blood pressure (hypertension) damages your blood vessels and puts strain on your heart. It is often referred to as the “silent killer.” Having high cholesterol is also dangerous because it can cause fatty deposits to clog your arteries, obstructing blood flow. It is recommended that you get your **blood pressure checked at least every 1 to 2 years** and have your **cholesterol checked every 5 years**. Your local senior center or health department may offer free blood pressure and cholesterol screening.

TYPE 2 DIABETES

Type 2 diabetes has become an epidemic in the US and approximately 18.3% of Americans age 60 years and older have type 2 diabetes. Diabetes is a chronic disease marked by high levels of sugar or glucose in the blood, which is caused by insulin insensitivity. Insulin is required to move glucose in to your cells and when glucose cannot enter cells, high amounts of sugar start to build up in the blood or



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hyperglycemia occurs. Inactivity, poor diet, age, hypertension, and obesity increase your risk for diabetes. As you age, your risk for developing type 2 diabetes increases because your insulin production declines and glucose intolerance increases. **Have a blood sugar test at least every 3 years.** If you already have diabetes check your blood sugars every day regularly.

EYES

Getting regular eye exams is the best way to protect your eyesight and it is **recommended that you get your vision checked at least every 2 years**, even if you do not suspect any eye problems. If you already have an eye condition, more frequent checkups are necessary, as recommended by your doctor. Research has shown that nutrition is a key component of your eye health. Foods that contain antioxidants (vitamins A and C) and omega-3 fatty acids such as leafy green vegetables and fish are foods good for eye health. Exercise also improves eye health because it improves blood circulation, which improves oxygen levels to the eyes and removal of harmful substances from the eye. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of blindness in people



over 65 and the progression is slow. A blind spot starts to appear in the middle of your field of vision. Research has shown that nutrition is especially important in preventing AMD. Other common eye conditions that occur with aging are cataracts, glaucoma, presbyopia (loss of near-vision), and diabetic retinopathy. If you have diabetes it is especially important to have your vision checked regularly to prevent retinopathy (painless condition that can be treated if caught early; if it is left untreated it can result in blindness). Having regular checkups can detect and prevent these eye conditions early.



EARS

About a third of Americans between 65 and 75 have hearing problems and about half of people 85 and older have hearing loss. If hearing loss is left untreated, it can continue to get worse. Presbycusis is age-related hearing loss and is common in older people. It develops at different rates in people. It is **recommended that you get your hearing checked at least every 3 years** and more often if you already have a hearing issue or if you suspect a change in hearing. Your local senior center may offer free screenings.