

# Top 10 Healthy New Year's (or Anytime) Resolutions for Older Adults

No matter how many New Year's you've rung in, it's never too late to resolve to live healthier.

Making a New Year's resolution to eat better, exercise, watch your weight, see your healthcare provider regularly, and quit smoking once and for all, can help you get healthier and feel better for many more years to come.

Here, from the American Geriatrics Society Foundation for Health in Aging, are leading experts' top 10 healthy New Year's resolutions for older adults:

**Eat your vegetables - and your fruits, whole grains, fish, low-fat dairy, and healthy fats.** Experts recommend eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily -- but less than a third of older adults do this. Don't miss out. Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables. Go for deep colors: dark green, bright yellow and orange choices like spinach, collard greens, carrots, oranges and cantaloupe are extra nutritious. Choose fiber-rich whole grain bread, rice and pasta instead of the white stuff. Pick less fatty meat, like chicken, and low-fat milk, cheese and yogurt. Shoot for heart-healthy fish, like tuna or salmon, twice a week. To help keep your bones strong, include sources of calcium and Vitamin D -- two daily servings of milk, yogurt, or cheese are a good bet -- in your diet. And use healthier fats, such as olive and canola oils, instead of butter or lard.

**Take a multivitamin-mineral.** Check labels and choose one that includes 100% of the "Daily Value" for most vitamins and minerals.

**See your doctor or healthcare provider regularly.** That means at least once a year, unless he or she says you should come in more often. At each visit, talk to your provider about the medications you're taking. Ask whether you should be getting any shots or tests for vision, hearing and other health problems such as breast or prostate cancer. If you're planning to start exercising, or exercise more, check with your provider first (see below). Also let him or her know if you need help quitting smoking and if you're feeling sad or worried, or having trouble sleeping.

**Move.** Exercise is safe and healthy for older people -- even older people with illness like heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis. Many of these conditions actually improve with exercise. Exercising can also help you control your weight, build your muscles and bones, and improve your balance, posture, and mood. Ask your healthcare provider to help you come up with an exercise plan that's right for you. Try working up to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise - like walking, bicycling, swimming, dancing or gardening - most days; and strength training exercises twice a week. Many YMCAs and YWCAs offer strength training classes.

**Toast celebrations & dinner with a smaller glass.** Drinking a "moderate" amount of alcohol may lower your risks of heart disease and some other illnesses. But what's "moderate" for a younger adult can be too much for an older person -- and some older people shouldn't drink at all. According to experts, moderate drinking means just 1 drink per day for older men and ½ a drink daily for older women. (A "drink" is 1 oz of hard liquor, 6 oz of wine, or 12 oz of beer.) Since alcohol can interact with certain drugs, ask your healthcare provider whether even this much is safe for you.

**Guard against falls.** One in every three older people falls each year -- and falls are a leading cause of injuries and deaths among seniors. Exercises such as walking or working out with an elastic exercise band can boost your strength, balance, and flexibility, and help you avoid falls. You should also bring all of your medications to your doctor or healthcare provider so he or she can make sure you're not taking any pills that can make you more likely to fall. Getting rid of things in your home that are easy to trip over, like throw rugs, putting "grab bars" in your bath or shower, and using night lights so it's easier to see, can also help.

**Give your brain a workout.** The more you use your mind, the better it'll work. Read. Do crossword puzzles. Try Suduko. Socializing also gives your brain a boost, so join a bridge club or a discussion group at the local library, senior center or church. Or take a course at your local community college. Some offer free classes to adults 65 and older.

**Get help quitting.** You can lower your risks of many health problems, breathe easier, enjoy more energy, and better sleep if you quit smoking- no matter how long ago you started. To make quitting easier, the National Cancer Institute has a special Web site, [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov), just for older smokers. Ask your healthcare provider for help, as well. If you take medications affected by smoking or have a smoking-related health problem, Medicare will pay for counseling to help you quit. Medicare's prescription drug benefit also covers nicotine patches and other products that can make quitting easier. Because some of these products can interact with certain drugs, though, always ask your provider before using them.

**Speak up when you feel down or anxious.** About 1 in 5 older people suffer from depression or anxiety. Lingering sadness, tiredness, loss of appetite or pleasure from things you once enjoyed, difficulty sleeping, worry, irritability, and wanting to be alone most of the time can all be signs that you need help. Tell your healthcare provider right away. There are many good treatments for these problems.

**Get a good night's sleep.** Older adults need less sleep than younger people, right? Wrong! Older people need just as much - at least 7 to 8 hours a night. Avoid daytime naps, which can keep you up in the evening.

Source: American Geriatrics Society's Foundation

[http://www.healthinaging.org/public\\_education/top\\_10\\_resolutions.php](http://www.healthinaging.org/public_education/top_10_resolutions.php)