

As individuals age, it's essential that they take charge of their own health, stay active, and maintain their independence. TOPS Club, Inc. (Take Off Pounds Sensibly), the nonprofit weight-loss support organization, offers tips for adults to keep their bodies and minds healthy.

Physical Activity

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one-third of adults over the age of 65 experience at least one fall each year. Muscle strength, reaction time, and stability can also decline dramatically after the age of 50. With these age-related factors, it's essential that senior adults remain active to maintain their mobility, prevent falls, and make everyday tasks easier. Senior adults should focus on these four areas of exercise:

- **Endurance**—The National Institute on Aging (NIA) suggests that senior adults participate in at least 30 minutes of physical activity that increases their heart rate, such as walking, jogging, biking, swimming, or raking, every day.

If an individual doesn't have a 30-minute time frame to spare or if just starting to exercise, break workouts into 10-minute increments.

- **Strength**—It's also essential that older adults continue working their muscles, so they can easily get up from a chair, climb stairs, carry groceries, and perform other daily tasks.

According to the NIA, senior adults should exercise their major muscle groups at least two days per week for 30 minutes. Weights, resistance bands and other common objects, like soup cans, can be used to train muscles. If new to weightlifting, start light and gradually increase the amount of weight.

- **Balance**—Improving balance can reduce the risk of falling. When starting out, use a chair or wall as support. Balance exercises, such as standing on one foot, walking heel-to-toe and practicing standing up and sitting down without using the hands, can be done anytime and anywhere.

- **Flexibility**—Don't forget to stretch, to continue to move freely and maintain range of motion. Having and maintaining flexibility makes tying shoes, reaching items on a shelf, and other actions easier.

The NIA recommends that older adults stretch three to five times each workout session, slowly stretching to a position and holding it for 10 to 30 seconds.

Healthy Eating

It's essential to maintain proper nutrition as people age. MyPlate, a plan introduced by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), is a reminder to fill half of the plate with fruits and vegetables and the remainder with lean protein and grains. Here are some tips for balanced meals from ChooseMyPlate.gov:

- **Vegetables**—Vegetables should have a large presence on the plate because they provide vitamins and minerals. There are many options to make sure you consume enough servings each day—fresh or frozen vegetables, vegetable soup and canned vegetables labeled “low sodium” or “no salt added.”

- **Fruits**—Fruits offer essential nutrients, including potassium, fiber, vitamin C and folic acid. To incorporate more fruits into the diet, keep a bowl of fruit on the counter, purchase dried or frozen fruits, top cereal with bananas, peaches, or strawberries, or toss some with a salad.

- **Whole grains**—Choose whole grains such as barley, popcorn, quinoa, pilaf, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, and bulgur. When purchasing products, select options that include whole grain first on the ingredient list.

- **Fat-free or low-fat dairy**—Pair your meals with skim or one percent milk. These options offer calcium, vitamin D, potassium, and more.

Individuals can include more low-fat dairy in their diets by substituting ingredients—plain yogurt instead of sour cream, fat-free milk instead of cream, and ricotta cheese instead of cream cheese.

- **Protein**—Choose proteins, such as lean beef and pork, chicken, turkey, nuts, eggs, beans, peas and soy products. Prepare a seafood meal twice a week.

- **Water**—It's essential for older adults to be conscious of how much water they're consuming. The NIA explains that as a person ages, they begin to experience a loss of the thirst sensation. Don't wait until feeling thirsty to have a drink.

Incorporate water into the daily diet. Consume foods that increase water intake—soup, oranges, watermelon, tomatoes and leafy, green vegetables. Take a bottle of water along when leaving home. Drink before and during workouts.

Mind Matters

There are many activities that older adults can do to keep their minds sharp. Here are some ideas:

- **Stay mentally active.** Play games that challenge the mind—Sudoku, crossword puzzles, chess, cards and memory games.

Continue education by taking classes, learning a new hobby, attending lectures and more. Stray from the norm by reading a new section in the newspaper or taking an alternative route to a familiar location.

- **Keep a journal.** An effective way to boost the memory is to write down the things to remember.

- **Get enough sleep.** The NIA suggests that older adults get seven to nine hours of sleep each night to increase alertness and boost brain function.

- **Be social.** According to the Mayo Clinic, social interaction can help fend off depression and stress, which can contribute to memory loss. Look for opportunities to spend time with others—go for lunch, volunteer, join a social group and participate in other shared activities.