

Fit to Retire

Stay healthy while you transition from workplace to retirement



Aging: The facts

How can we age without getting old?

Aging is a biological process of change that starts at birth. Yes, it's true, you may not have the same strength or physical abilities at 50 or 60 that you had in your 20's or 30's, but you don't have to let your age be defined by a calendar.

Your real age is a matter of how you think and what you decide you want your future to be. Embrace healthy aging — it's your move!

Two people may have the same chronological age, but a different functional age. Your age will be impacted by your life experiences and by how you feel physically.

Are you at an age when you are considering retirement? The information in this booklet will help you prepare to leave the workforce, and move on to new and exciting changes.

You will find useful information on:

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Staying connected

What makes a healthy retiree?

Being socially connected gives individuals meaningful roles that provide self-esteem and purpose to life. The protective effect of being socially connected has a strong influence on emotional well-being, better health and longer life.

Supportive relationships have a positive effect on your health. The Public Health Agency of Canada has found that, “people who remain actively engaged in life, and connected to those around them are generally happier, in better physical and mental health, and more empowered to cope effectively with change and life transitions”.

Marriage, friendships and community ties all appear to increase life expectancy. Social support protects people from many damaging effects of stressful life events.

Staying connected paves your path to a healthy retirement.

How can you stay connected?

- Schedule visits with family members and friends
- Participate in faith-based groups or other organizations
- Volunteer your time. Volunteering can increase your feelings of productivity and it’s a great way to contribute to your community
- Spend time with your peers
- Enjoy friendships with people both young and old
- Try something new and meet people with similar interests
- Learn something new. Contact your local university, college, or community centre for a schedule of their life-long learning opportunities
- Stay active or get active. Walk with a friend, exercise on your own or join a fitness centre that has classes for all levels of physical fitness
- Set meaningful goals, think about things you would like to do and plan the time to do them
- Use social media to stay connected. If you’re not familiar with social media, consider taking a class through your local library, community centre or other education institution. Having a strong social network can make you happier and healthier

Getting Fit for Life

Physical activity benefits everyone. According to the World Health Organization “regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and manage noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and several cancers. It also helps prevent hypertension... and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being.”

Physical activity is a very important component of our lives and, as we age, it becomes increasingly important that this activity includes strength and balance training. Along with a reduction in fall risk, lower limb muscle strengthening exercises are believed to improve flexibility, functional capacity and balance. Additionally, exercise programs that include a significant challenge to balance and consist of more than three hours per week have greater fall prevention effects than general exercise or strength training alone.

If you are not active now, starting any amount of physical activity is beneficial. Start slowly and gradually increase the amount and intensity of physical activity to meet the recommended guidelines.

The new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults recommend adults achieve at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week. It is also beneficial to add muscle and bone strengthening activities, using major muscle groups, at least two days per week. The more physical activity you do, the greater the health benefits will be. Add physical activity to your day:

- Join a walking or running group
- Sign up for Tai Chi, dance classes or a sport
- When going somewhere...go active! Use an active mode of transportation such as biking or walking to get around
- Be active with your family during your leisure time
- Take the stairs whenever you can
- Select an activity you enjoy doing and do it more often

Studies show that when people choose a physical activity they enjoy doing, they tend to stay committed to it.



**Get at least
150 minutes**

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activity per week.

Important considerations

Start slowly and build up your activities. Remember to drink plenty of liquids to stay hydrated.



Use sun protection, including sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher protection



Wear a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protection



Warm up with five minutes of a light activity



Cool down with stretching no matter what physical activity you are doing



Warming up helps direct needed blood flow to your muscles and prepares your body for exercise. This helps prevent injuries and enables you to gain maximal benefits from the physical activity since loose and warm muscles will respond better. Cooling down allows your heart and breathing to slow down and return to a normal resting level.

Use the appropriate safety gear and sports equipment for the physical activity you are doing and make sure that they are in good repair.

Healthy eating

Eating well paves your path to a healthy retirement!

Healthy eating is important for all ages, but it's especially important for adults over 50 years old. It promotes longevity and well-being, and it can help decrease the risk of health issues such as osteoporosis, cancer, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. As part of normal aging, your body's needs for calories and nutrients will change.

Healthy eating is about more than the foods you eat. It's also about taking the time to enjoy your food, being mindful of your eating habits, eating with others, and cooking more often. It's never too late to learn new cooking skills or revive those you might not have used in a while.

Here are some healthy eating tips to keep you on track for a healthy retirement.

Eat a variety of foods

Eating a well-balanced and varied diet is the best way to meet your nutritional needs. It's what you eat on a regular basis that matters most for your health.

Follow these recommendations from Canada's Food Guide:

- Aim to fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit at all meals and include them more often as snacks. Eat a variety of colourful vegetables and fruit including dark green (e.g., kale, bok choy) and orange (e.g., carrots, sweet potato) vegetables every day.
- Enjoy a variety of whole grains every day. Whole grains such as quinoa, rolled oats, brown rice and whole grain bread provide more fibre and nutrients than refined grains (e.g., white bread)



- Include protein foods such as beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, lean meats and poultry, fish, shellfish, eggs, lower fat milk and dairy products. Try replacing some meat or poultry with plant-based protein foods such as kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils, which provide more fibre and less saturated fat
- Drink skim, 1% or 2% milk or fortified soy beverage each day. These foods will provide you with vitamin D and calcium both of which are important to maintain strong bones and teeth
- Compare the nutrition facts table on packaged foods to choose products that are lower in sodium, sugars and saturated fat
- Satisfy your thirst with water. Fluids are important for your body to function at its best. When you don't get enough fluids, you can become dehydrated which can lead to feeling tired and confused. As you age, it can become more difficult to recognize when you are thirsty. Make it routine to drink water often throughout the day and with each meal and snack

Are vitamin and mineral supplements needed?

- Besides eating vitamin D-rich foods (e.g., milk, fish), Health Canada recommends all adults over 51 years old take a vitamin D supplement. Talk to your health care professional about the amount that is right for you. In addition, if you are not eating enough calcium-rich foods (e.g., milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified beverages, tofu (prepared with calcium sulfate), sardines, beans, figs and bok choy), you may also want to ask your health care professional about a calcium supplement.
- If you follow the recommendations in Canada's Food Guide, you should be getting the essential nutrients for good health.
- If you choose to take a multivitamin, speak with your healthcare provider to recommend which multivitamin you should take.



Overcoming the challenges!

You may find it challenging to shop and cook for one or two people, especially if you are used to doing these things for a larger family or have never been the main cook. To overcome these challenges, try the following suggestions from Canada's Food Guide:

Challenge	Solution
Not knowing what to cook	Plan your meals and make a grocery list ahead of time so you don't forget anything.
Not having the energy to cook	Cook once, eat twice. Make meals that can be used for leftovers or to make another dish. Make a larger amount and freeze the extras.
Increased cost	Partner up and share shopping with a friend or relative. Many grocery stores offer a discount if you buy two items instead of one which is often too much for one person. Take advantage of the reduced price, by splitting the items with a friend or relative.
Loneliness	Eat with others! Eating with others is great for the company and it can also be good for your health. It may encourage you to eat more of the foods that you need to stay healthy. If you live alone, try: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• joining a lunch group• eating with a neighbour• inviting a family member over• partnering up with a friend and planning a few cooking days with them. This way you can share making meals and try each other's recipes and food traditions• planning a potluck with friends• checking local seniors' community centres and asking about monthly lunches or community kitchens you could join

Where can I get more nutrition information?

For more information and nutrition resources, visit unlockfood.ca and [Canada's Food Guide](#)

To speak to a registered dietitian for free, confidential advice and information on nutrition and healthy eating, visit [Health Connect Ontario](#) or call 811.

Stress management

Are you feeling good today?

Stress is the result of your body's response to certain events or situations in your life, and it tends to occur when you feel overburdened by various responsibilities.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation recognizes that stress carries several negative health consequences, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, as well as immune and circulatory complications. Ongoing exposure to stress can lead to behaviors such as smoking, over-consumption of alcohol and less-healthy eating habits.

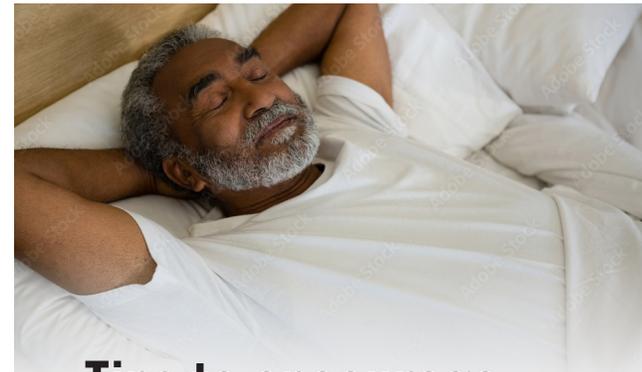
Although it's not realistic to expect to feel good about ourselves all the time, there are many things we can do to improve our sense of well-being by making healthier self-care choices.

Healthy eating

Research indicates that some people tend to respond to stress by over or under eating. This can lead to changes in weight or digestive problems such as diarrhea and constipation. Healthy eating reduces our risks for a variety of diseases, increases our immune function and provides us with energy to better manage our stress.

Be sure to:

- Eat nutrient-packed meals and snacks such as yogurt, whole grain crackers and cheese, and vegetables and fruit
- Eat regularly - avoid skipping meals. You may benefit from eating smaller, more frequent meals and snacks throughout the day
- Make mealtime relaxing - set aside uninterrupted, distraction free time to enjoy your meals. Play some soothing music and choose a comfortable place to eat
- Cut down on caffeine - limit coffee to 2 to 2.5 cups coffee a day
- Any reduction in alcohol use has benefits.
[Drinking less is better for everyone.](#) For more information, visit [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health.](#)



Tips to encourage regular and adequate hours of sleep:

- Keep a regular bedtime routine by going to bed at the same time each night
- Avoid exercise, alcohol and heavy meals before bedtime, but don't go to bed hungry
- Avoid working, reading or watching television in bed
- Make sure the room is quiet, dark and has a comfortable room temperature

Regular physical activity

Physical activity is a great way to manage stress. It helps to release muscle tension and the accumulation of hormones caused by stress. Visit a nearby park, trail or forest as evidence shows spending more time outdoors is one of the best ways to improve mental well-being. The key is to set realistic goals and find activities that are easily accessible and enjoyable. Physical activity provides an outlet for you to work out your feelings of anger, frustration, and fear. This helps you to feel more relaxed and even enhances sleep.

Regular hours of sleep

The right amount of sleep can help build the immune system, fight disease, repair muscles and cells, and energize both the body and mind. Adults of all ages need seven to eight hours of sleep every night. If you're sleep deprived, you may experience irritation and frustration more easily and be less tolerant of others. You may also have difficulty coping with stressors in the workplace or at home.

Humour and stress

Laughter brings oxygen into the lungs. It lowers blood pressure, boosts the immune system, eases muscle tension, stimulates the brain and elevates our mood. It helps us to look at ourselves from different perspectives. Share a joke or story with your friends and family, seek out entertainments like comedies playing in your community, humorous movies or books. Allow yourself to laugh and see the lighter side of life.

Get help if you need it

Some problems are hard to deal with by yourself. It's good to talk to a healthcare professional that is specially trained to help people cope with problems. The following places can help you:

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

A nationwide, voluntary organization that promotes the mental health of all, and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. Visit the CMHA website at cmha.ca

Mental Health Services Information Ontario

Trained professionals answer calls related to mental health services and supports across Ontario. The service is available 24 hours and seven days a week and it is available in over 140 different languages. Visit Ontario's Mental Health Helpline at mentalhealthhelpline.ca

Try these relaxation techniques to help you de-stress:

Breathe

Take slow, deep abdominal breaths

Visualize

Imagine yourself relaxing, such as lying on the beach or in a hammock

Repeat affirmations

Repeat a positive statement to yourself such as: "I am calm and relaxed"

Practice progressive muscle relaxation

Systematically tense and relax each muscle group. Start with your head, neck and face, and work down your body to your feet and toes

Age-friendly communities

Health is not just about lifestyle choices, it's also about where you live. Complete communities are designed to support healthy aging and independent living. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, in an age-friendly community, the policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to help older adults "age actively". Communities which support older adults by staying connected, getting fit for life, healthy eating and managing stress are known as age-friendly.

Features of an Age-friendly Community may include:

- Social clubs and programs for older adults
- Pleasant, safe, and accessible walking and cycling paths
- Benches with armrests in public spaces and along pathways and trails
- Walking or Tai Chi groups and access to volunteer opportunities

Features that benefit older adults benefit other age groups as well. Communities that work for older adults, work for everyone. You can get involved in making your community more age-friendly when you:

Talk to your neighbours about issues affecting your community and share ideas. For example, are there places to walk, to sit and rest, to visit with friends that are safe and easy to get to?

Learn more about your municipality's official plan or plans for development. What can you do to make your community more age-friendly?

Meet friends at your neighbourhood park, volunteer, or join a program at your local community centre, library, or Seniors' Centre.

For more information

York Region Public Health – Healthy Aging and Fall Prevention

york.ca/healthyaging

York Region Public Health – Physical Activity

york.ca/physicalactivity

York Region Public Health – Nutrition

york.ca/nutrition

Government of Canada Information for Seniors

www.canada.ca/seniors

Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility

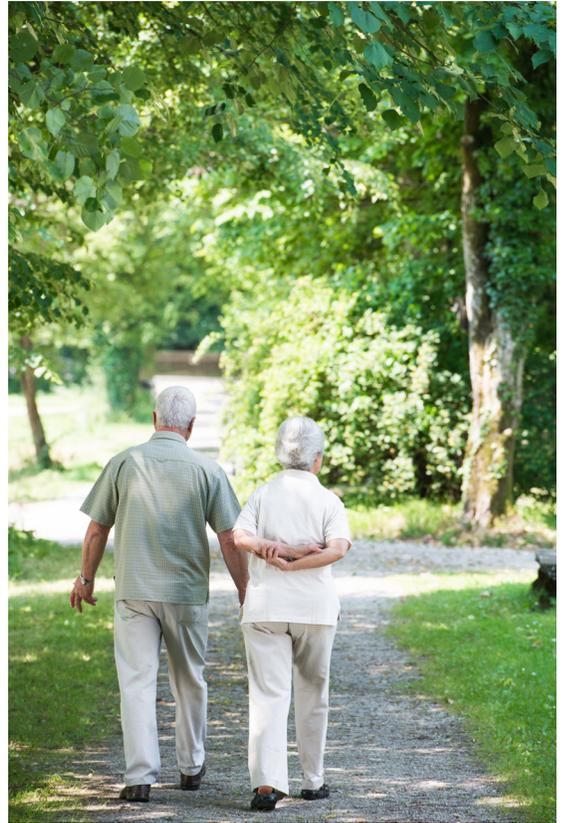
www.ontario.ca/seniors

Public Health Agency of Canada

www.publichealth.gc.ca/seniors

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada

www.heartandstroke.ca



For more information on healthy aging and other health related topics, please call

**Access York at 1-877-464-9675 or
TTY 1-866-512-6228**