

Aging on Your Terms: Staying Healthy and Independent

By Dr. Heidi Schwarzwald

(NAPS)—Healthy aging isn't just about luck and genetics; it's about empowering yourself to live your best life as you get older. By focusing on healthy habits, strong support networks and proactive care, you can significantly improve your quality of life, allowing you to age on your own terms.

As a physician, I often hear questions from older adults about maintaining their health and independence. While individual needs and preferences vary, I typically suggest focusing on three key pillars: preventing falls, managing prescription medications and developing a personal health management plan. There are simple actions you can take as early as today to stay healthy on your terms.

Preventing Falls to Stay Steady and Independent



Aging brings changes to muscle strength, bone density, balance and reaction time. If not addressed proactively, these shifts can make older adults more susceptible to falls. Falls are the primary cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries among older adults, yet many are preventable.

Simple preventative measures can significantly reduce your risk of falling and help you maintain your independence—here are a few focus areas to consider:

- **Home Safety:** Modify your living environment by eliminating tripping hazards, enhancing lighting and installing grab bars in bathrooms.
- **Physical Activity:** Incorporate balance and strength-training exercises, such as tai chi, yoga or walking, to improve stability and coordination.
- **Vision and Footwear:** Ensure regular eye examinations and wear supportive, non-slip footwear to prevent stumbles.
- **Medication Review:** Consult with a health care provider to identify any medications that may induce dizziness or drowsiness, thereby increasing the risk of falls.

Managing Medications with Clarity and Confidence

Many older adults take more prescription medications as they age, which can be challenging to manage. *The Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that more than four out of 10 adults aged 65 or older take five or more medications, often prescribed by multiple health care providers.

Effective medication management goes beyond simply filling and taking prescriptions. It's crucial to know when and how to take them, as well as understanding why you need them. That's the focus of the comprehensive medication review Signify Health clinicians complete with health plan members during an In-Home Health Evaluation (IHE). There are also steps that you can take to stay on track and be prepared:

- **Know Your Medications:** Understand why you take each medication, what it does and any potential side effects to monitor. Maintain an up-to-date list of all your medications, including doses and reasons for taking them. This list should include over-the-counter drugs, supplements and herbal remedies, and is something that you should share with your primary care provider (PCP).
- **Use and Store Them Correctly:** Understand how and when to take your medications and what to do if a dose is



There are several steps you can take to stay healthy as you get older.

missed. Be sure to store them properly to maintain their effectiveness.

A personal health management plan—developed with your PCP—is important for healthy aging. A tailored plan provides structure, especially for managing chronic conditions and shifts your care from reactive to proactive, significantly improving your quality of life by addressing key areas of physical, mental and emotional well-being.

A healthy aging plan depends on the individual but there are universal components that I recommend for older adults:



- **Regular Check-ups with your Primary Care Provider:** Foster a trusting relationship with your PCP and prioritize routine physicals and screenings for early detection of potential health concerns.
- **Know Your Numbers:** Regularly monitor and track key health metrics, like blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol levels.
- **Healthy Lifestyle:** Maintain a balanced diet, engage in consistent physical activity and ensure adequate sleep.
- **Mental and Emotional Health:** Prioritize your mental and emotional well-being. This includes annual cognitive tests; seeking support for stress, anxiety or depression; and participating in activities that promote mental stimulation and social connection.

How Signify Health Can Support Healthy Aging

Signify Health can be part of your healthy aging support system starting with an In-Home Health Evaluation. These evaluations are a cornerstone of proactive health care, designed to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of your health status. Through IHEs, our experienced clinicians can help identify potential health risks early, facilitate the development of personal health management plans, and help connect you with the appropriate resources and support to help you optimize your health as you age. Many Medicare Advantage plans offer In-Home Health Evaluations at no cost to members and it's easy to see if this is an option for you. To check your eligibility and schedule an IHE, visit HelloSignify.com or call 1-855-984-5121.

By focusing on these key areas—preventing falls, managing your medications and developing a personal health management plan—you can empower yourself and your loved ones to take the necessary steps toward healthy aging.