



## A Patient's Guide to Avoiding Preventable Hospital Visits

A hospital visit often results in physical, mental, and financial stress for seniors and even for their loved ones. While not all emergencies can be avoided, there are preventative measures that seniors can take to reduce their chances of being admitted to the hospital. In fact, 48.5% of senior hospitalizations could be avoided if preventative steps are taken.

### **HOW?**

In this guide, we discuss steps you can take today to help you prevent hospitalization. These steps include:

- Keep moving
- Engage your mind
- Maintain proper nutrition
- Visit your doctor
- Improve visibility
- Address fall hazards
- Manage chronic conditions
- Maintain personal care

Learn more about the preventative steps you can take to remain happy, healthy, and at home.

# KEEP MOVING

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If you don't move it, you lose it! As we age, it becomes harder to move around and exercise due to health problems, weight, pain, falling, etc. Getting up and moving can boost heart health, give you energy, and help you maintain your independence—keeping you out of the hospital.

## **BENEFITS OF EXERCISE FOR SENIORS**

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Seniors that become sedentary tend to have more complications and health issues. Specifically, sedentary adults are more likely to experience the following:

- Cancer
- Blood sugar spikes
- Memory loss
- Restless sleep
- Body aches and pains

A sedentary lifestyle not only affects your body physically, but it also has negative effects on your mood. Exercising releases endorphins that help fight stress and boost your mood.

On the other hand, exercising as a senior can help you:

- Maintain weight
- Enhance flexibility
- Reduce impact of illness and chronic disease
- Increase balance
- Boost brain function
- Release stress

If you aren't already exercising, start today! (But you should always consult with your physician before starting any new exercise regimen. While maintaining an active lifestyle is difficult at any age, it is an important aspect of living your life to the fullest.

## BEST EXERCISES FOR SENIORS

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You may worry about existing aches and pains, falling, or you might not know where to start. Don't worry! Here are a few low impact exercises to choose from:



**WALKING:** Walking doesn't require any extra equipment or a trip to the gym. Just put on your walking shoes and some comfortable clothes and go for a walk. If it's cold outside, you can even walk in place.



**WATER AEROBICS:** If you have access to a pool, try water aerobics or swimming. Water reduces the stress on your joints and can be a great form of cardio.



**YOGA:** Yoga helps seniors with their balance, core strength, and flexibility. There are yoga poses for every skill level too!



**RESISTANCE BANDS:** Working out with elastic resistance bands can help build strength even while sitting down.



**WALL PUSHUPS:** All you need is a wall for these pushups. Just stand an arm's length from the wall and place your palms flat on it. Lean your body toward the wall, then gently push back until your arms are straight again.



**BACK LEG RAISES:** Stand next to a table or chair for balance. Lift one leg backwards without bending your knee. Don't lean forward, and don't point your toes. Then lower your leg. You can also do side leg raises, lifting your leg to the side instead of to the back.

By working on your balance and core strength through these exercises, you can reduce your chances of falling in addition to staying healthier.

Even with an established routine, it might be difficult for you to get into a routine of exercising. To make your experience more enjoyable try listening to an audio book or your favorite music. Attend a class with other seniors. Find a friend to exercise with you, so you don't have to go at it alone.

If you are concerned about your health, consult your doctor before you begin an exercise routine. You don't want to push yourself too hard, especially if you have chronic conditions. Pay attention to your body, and if you feel too fatigued, take a break. Remember to always drink lots of water!

# ENGAGE YOUR MIND

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Staying out of the hospital isn't only about keeping your body healthy; it's also about keeping your mind sharp. As we age, it is normal to experience some memory loss and lose cognitive function. However, don't let that discourage you! Poor mental health often leads to poor physical health. But there are many ways to establish good mental health and exercise your mind.

## HOW TO KEEP YOUR MIND ACTIVE

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Your mind needs stimulation just like your body does. Luckily, there are many ways to keep your mind active regardless of your age. Here are just a few suggestions.

**PUZZLES** Puzzles are the ultimate challenge for the mind! Your brain must be actively engaged to figure out how to put a puzzle together, helping your learning and memory.

**THINKING GAMES** Playing games that make you think is a great way to keep the mind engaged. Many games require short-term and even long-term recall. Whether it's Scrabble or the daily crossword, have some fun while you stimulate your mind.

**LEARNING NEW SKILLS** Learning something new is a challenge at any age. As a senior, know that you can still learn new tricks! Try to learn a new language. Learn how to do a new skill, like sewing or painting. Learning new tasks can help build new connections in your brain and preserve existing ones.

**HOBBIES** Do you have a passion? Pursue it! Hobbies can help you find enjoyment and purpose. Many hobbies—like gardening or sewing—require cognitive skills.

**SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT** Talking to people in person, over the phone, or online actually improves your brain health. Plus, it builds a strong social network that can support you during tough times. Have your friends over, attend community events, and engage with others in forums or chat group.

**READ**

Instead of watching TV, try reading instead. Reading exercises your mind and can decrease your chance of developing dementia. Reading is a good pastime that is both entertaining and beneficial for your overall health.

**PETS**

Pets require responsibility, engaging your memory and providing companionship. If you have a pet, you need to remember to feed it, give it water, take it on walks (if necessary), and keep up with its health needs and regular medications.

If you do end up in the hospital, you can still do many of these activities to help pass the time and stay sharp.

# MAINTAIN PROPER NUTRITION

In addition to exercise, your body needs good food. Seniors require more protein to retain muscle and maintain a healthy immune system. Many seniors don't get enough vitamin A, B, C, D, E, or folic acid. Lack of nutrients and vitamins can cause health complications that can cause you to end up in the hospital.

## **BENEFITS OF GOOD NUTRITION**

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Good nutrition provides benefits for your physical and mental health. Here are some of the benefits of having a proper diet:

### **INCREASED ALERTNESS:**

Your brain needs nutrients to stay alert and focused. If you feel tired or weak, you may not be getting the nutrients that you need. The brain needs sugar, carbohydrates, iron, and other nutrients.

### **PREVENT DISEASE:**

A well-balanced diet can help prevent you from getting chronic illnesses like diabetes. Additionally, you will be at a lower risk for high cholesterol, heart conditions, vision loss, and high blood pressure. Poor eating habits can exacerbate these issues, causing health complications as you get older.

### **POSITIVE MOOD:**

Tired of being tired? Getting the proper nutrients can help boost your mood and keep you energized, focused, and positive. In addition, your diet can help reduce stress levels and mood swings. If your body feels good, your mind feels good too.

### **MEMORY:**

Believe it or not, the food you eat impacts your memory. Fresh fruits and vegetables contain vitamins and minerals that contribute to the brain's recall ability.

## THE SENIOR DIET

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Knowing the benefits of a healthy diet isn't much help unless you know what your body needs. Here are some tips to help you get proper nutrition as you age.

Best foods for seniors:



**Whole grains:** Seniors need carbs, but there are some carbs that won't sustain you throughout the day. Stay away from refined sugars and flours and go for whole grain products instead. Seniors need between 5 and 10 ounces of grains per day.

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**Good fat:** Seniors need a few ounces of healthy fat (monosaturated fat) each day. Healthy fats, found in avocados and nuts, help the body absorb nutrients.

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**Antioxidant-rich foods:** Berries, beans, green tea, and beets are all rich in antioxidants, which help cut down on free radicals in the body. Antioxidants can help boost the immune system and prevent disease.

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**Protein:** Protein helps repair cells in your body. Eggs, red meat, nuts, and poultry are great sources of protein for seniors. USDA suggests that seniors get 5 to 7 ounces of protein.



**Fruits & Veggies:** Seniors should get 1.5 to 2.5 cups of fruit in their diet along with 2 to 3.5 cups of vegetables. Fruits and veggies are packed with nutrients and vitamins for a well-balanced meal.

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**Dairy:** Seniors should choose fat-free or low-fat milk. It's best to drink about 3 cups per day. However, you can get dairy from yogurt, cheese, or cottage milk.

## **IF YOU CAN'T PREPARE MEALS**

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If you can't prepare your own meals due to pain, cognitive function, mobility, or other reasons, there are ways to still get a balanced diet.

Caring Senior Service offers in-home caregivers who can go to the grocery store and prepare healthy meals for you. Our staff can make meals how you want them to be prepared, and we can address your dietary needs to make sure you are properly nourished.

However, if you don't need someone to come into your home and prepare meals, there are meal services that can deliver groceries and meals right to your door. The most important thing is that you are eating properly to keep your body strong and healthy.

# VISIT YOUR DOCTOR

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Another key element to staying out of the hospital is visiting your doctor regularly. While you might not like to go to the doctor's office, having regular checkups can help identify health issues before they become major problems.

When visiting with your doctor, you may need routine tests, such as the following:

- Blood pressure
- Height
- Weight
- Blood work
- EKG
- Colonoscopy
- Mammogram (females)
- Pap smear (females)
- Prostate exam (males)

These tests help ensure that your body is healthy in addition to assessing risk for potential health problems.

Your doctor will also want to go over your current medications. Come prepared to your appointment with the medication name and dosage instructions. You can always bring the medication bottles with you just to be safe. Your doctor may ask about over-the-counter medications as well.

During your checkup, discuss any health concerns or abnormalities. If you have been experiencing unusual symptoms, bring them up! Don't ignore any symptoms, big or small, because they could have an impact on your health. If not addressed, these small health issues can turn into major illnesses that cause you to be admitted to the hospital.

## **IF YOU DON'T HAVE TRANSPORTATION**

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If you don't have your own transportation or can no longer drive, you can arrange transportation through Caring Senior Service! Our caregivers are more than happy to pick you up, accompany you to the appointment, and drop you off at home.

While there are many transportation services, like Uber or Lyft, their services aren't senior specific. Their drivers aren't trained to help seniors with mobility challenges get into and out of vehicles. Additionally, these drivers can't stay with you during an appointment if you need support or want companionship. Choosing a transportation service that has experience helping seniors can help you feel more comfortable and confident.

## **AFTER THE APPOINTMENT**

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Your doctor will give you specific instruction to maintain your health. This instruction could include eating requirements, medications, exercises, etc. It is important that you follow doctor's orders after your appointment! Not following the instruction could lead to worsened conditions, mismanaged medication, or other issues. By following instructions carefully, you can stay healthy and prevent hospital admissions.

Many seniors have difficulty remembering to take their medications on time. Some may even mix up their prescriptions and take the wrong pills. If you need assistance, there are medication reminders and automatic medication dispensers to help you. Additionally, our caregivers can remind you when to take your medication.

# IMPROVE VISIBILITY

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The lightbulbs around your house might keep you out of the hospital! Many seniors fall due to poor lighting and visibility. Evaluate your own visibility around your home to help reduce the likelihood of a fall. Here are some tips:

### **GET YOUR EYES CHECKED:**

The problem might not be the lighting around your house; it might be with your own vision. Visit a local optometrist and get your eyes checked. If you need a prescription, wear your glasses as instructed. With improved eye sight, you can see more clearly and avoid running into or tripping on objects around your home.

### **OPEN THE BLINDS:**

Get some natural light in your home by opening your curtains and blinds. While this light is only available during the day, it can help cut down on your energy bill, while providing ample lighting in spaces near windows.

### **COOLER LIGHTS:**

Cooler weeks refer to the coloring of a light. Warm lights have a lower temperature color and may glow yellow or orange. However, cool lights have more of a blue tone and are perceived as brighter, making it easier for you to see around your home.

### **NO CONTRAST LIGHTING:**

You might like how contrast lighting looks with elegant shadows and drastic light patterns. However, lighting that creates contrast can be dangerous. Seniors typically need consistent and level lighting throughout the home, especially in hallways and stairways.

### **TASK LIGHTS:**

Task lighting refers to having lights where you spend your time. For example, if you read on your couch, you might want a lamp next to the couch for brighter light while reading. Task lighting creates more lighting where you spend the most time in your

home. Having lights nearby also allows you to adjust and control lighting within reach.

### **ACCESSIBLE LIGHT SWITCHES:**

Flip light switches can be difficult for seniors with arthritis, shaking, or other health issues. When possible, change your lighting controls to a more accessible option like a button or sliding switch.

### **DIMMER SWITCHES:**

Seniors are more sensitive to bright lights. Dimmers allow you to adjust the light levels based on the time of day or your activities, so you can get the proper amount of lighting when you need it.

# ADDRESS FALL HAZARDS

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More than 1 in 4 seniors fall each year. And once you have a fall, the chance of falling again doubles. Falls can be very dangerous and even life threatening for seniors, making it extremely important to remove fall hazards around the home.

## FALL STATISTICS

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- 1 in 5 falls results in a serious injury (like a broken bone)
- 3 million seniors are treated in the ER for fall-related injuries
- 95% of hip fractures are caused by falls
- Traumatic brain injuries are most often caused by falls
- Fall death rate is projected to be 7 deaths per hour by 2030

However, many falls can be prevented! There are simple things you can do around your home to make it safer for you sacrificing your comfort or convenience.

## FALL PREVENTION TIPS

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Here are some of the simple things you can do around your home to reduce fall hazards.

**Remove things you could potentially trip on.** While you might not have tripped over that rug in the past few years, it could become an obstacle that trips you. Look for things you could trip over like rugs, trim, room transitions, cords, etc. Remove the items if possible.

**Add grab bars.** 80% of the time, falls happen in the bathroom. Grab bars are great tool to help you get in and out of the bathtub without slipping as well as get up from the toilet with ease. These can be attached to the wall and are a simple solution for fall prevention.

**Raised toilet seat and shower seats.** Consider getting a shower seat and/or a raised toilet seat for your bathroom as well. Sitting down while showering can help you avoid falling. And a raised toilet seat makes it easier for you to get up.

**Evaluate furniture and placement.** Some floorplans are just more difficult to navigate. As you age, it may become more difficult for you to squeeze by that glass coffee table to get to the couch. Analyze your furniture arrangement and rearrange if necessary. Move breakable objects away from your common walking paths in case you do fall.

**Keep floors clean.** Small items like shoes and clothes can turn into deadly hazards when they are left on the floor. Clear the floors regularly to avoid building up clutter and to prevent falling. If water or other liquid spills onto the floor, clean it up immediately.

**Wear good shoes.** Your shoes may be part of the problem. Choose footwear that won't cause you to trip, stumble, or fall. Avoid flip flops, high, heels, and shoes without traction. Additionally, avoid walking around the house in socks, which can be slick.

**Don't rely on walls or furniture to steady you.** Many seniors tend to hold onto walls or furniture when they have difficulty walking. However, furniture may not be sturdy or stable. If you notice that you are holding onto objects or even other people as you walk, it may be time to see a physical therapist or invest in a cane or walker.

**Install railings on the stairs.** If you don't already have secure railings on your stairs, add them! We recommend adding one railing on each side of all sets of stairs in your home.

Caring Senior Service also conducts a FREE home safety assessment in which one of our trained care managers walk through every room in your home to look for safety concerns. This assessment can help you identify other areas to improve your home safety to keep you at home and out of the hospital!

# MANAGE CHRONIC CONDITIONS

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About 85% of seniors have at least one chronic health condition, and about 60% have more than one condition. These conditions can be difficult to manage and cause many health complications. If you have a chronic condition, it is important that you manage it properly to avoid a trip to the hospital.

## COMMON CHRONIC CONDITIONS

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These are the most common chronic conditions found in seniors:

- Arthritis
- Dementia
- Alzheimer's disease
- Diabetes
- Parkinson's disease
- Glaucoma
- Cataracts
- Macular degeneration
- Depression
- Osteoporosis

There are other chronic conditions that seniors face, but there are ways to manage these conditions.

## STEPS TO MANAGE CONDITIONS

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### **DON'T FEEL DISCOURAGED.**

It can be easy to feel discouraged when receiving the diagnosis of a chronic condition. You may feel helpless or like you have lost some of your freedom and independence. However, by learning more about the condition, you can understand it more and learn how to cope better.

### **KNOW THE FACTS.**

For you to manage your chronic condition, you must understand it. Learn everything you can about your condition and how it affects your body by talking with your doctor. Ask questions and take notes while discussing your chronic condition. There are also many foundations and organizations dedicated to educating seniors and family members on specific conditions. These organizations can provide valuable resources and give you a community.

### **DISCUSS ALL TREATMENT OPTIONS.**

Explore all treatment options with your doctor and determine which treatment option is right for you. Most of these conditions cannot be cured, but there are treatments to help manage the symptoms. Treatment may include diet, exercise, medication, and other factors.

### **RECORD YOUR MEDICAL HISTORY.**

Maintain an up-to-date list of medications and diagnosed conditions. This list can help your friends, family members, caregivers, and doctor's out if something were to happen. A portable medical storage bracelet keeps this information organized in a digital format. You may also want to keep copies of lab results and tests.

### **GET CARE TO MEET YOUR NEEDS.**

If needed, you can get personalized care to help you manage your condition. Caregivers can help you prepare meals, get to doctor's appointments, remember medication, and manage chronic conditions. Caring Senior Service trains caregivers to assist seniors with specific conditions, like the ones mentioned above, so they can provide quality non-medical care that addresses each client's needs.

Know that each chronic condition comes with its own difficulties and treatment for effective management. But by managing the conditions you have, you can help prevent them from getting worse or from being diagnosed with other conditions.

# MAINTAIN PERSONAL CARE

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Personal care might get overlooked, but it has a big impact on your overall health and wellness. If you don't take care of your hygiene, you could end up in the hospital with infections or other health conditions. Learn about how to address some common personal care items below.

## SKIN DRYNESS

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It's common to get dry skin as you age. In fact, most seniors have dry, flaky skin. Dry skin is caused by a reduction in oil and sweat glands, which happens naturally as we age. Chronic conditions can also increase dryness in skin.

### How to care for dry skin:

- Bathe less frequently or with cooler water. Bathing too often or with water that is too hot causes the skin to dry out more quickly.
- Use mild soaps, shampoos, and conditioners.
- Apply sunscreen before you go outside, and don't spend too much time in the sun.
- Drink lots of water and stay hydrated.
- Apply moisturizer daily.
- Avoid perfume.
- Use a humidifier in your home.

## BATHING

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As we get older, it gets more difficult to bathe. Not bathing can cause skin infections, urinary tract infections, irritation, odor, itching, or other problems. To help you make the most of bathing, here are some tips:

- Don't bathe every day. As mentioned above, bathing every day can cause your skin to dry out. Seniors should bathe 1 to 2 times per week to help avoid infections and skin breakdowns.

- Wash skin folds between baths as needed. Use a warm washcloth to clean your armpits, genitals, feet, and other areas of the body that might need to be freshened up.
- Do wash your hands several times a day. If they get dry, you can always use lotion.
- Try waterless cleansers or bathing wipes if you have a difficult time taking a shower or bath. These products can help you stay clean between bathing, and they won't dry out your skin.
- Always check for skin infections, sore, or rashes. These can hide in skin folds and in areas that may be hard to see.

## **BRUISING**

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Seniors bruise more easily than younger people because our skin gets thinner and less fatty as we age, weakening blood vessels. Some medications or conditions can affect the amount of time it takes a bruise to heal.

### **How to care for a bruise:**

While bruises heal on their own, there are some ways that seniors can care for bruises to help them heal faster.

- Place an ice pack or cold compress on the bruise for about 20 minutes to reduce inflammation.
- Elevate the bruised area so that it is higher than the heart.
- Increase Vitamin C intake to boost collagen.
- Avoid smoking.

Bruises should heal on their own; however, if you notice a bruise has taken a longer time to heal than normal, contact your doctor.

## HAIR

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Hair is a big deal to many individuals because it impacts your overall appearance. Seniors can take care of their hair to help them feel their best. Remember, a good mental state helps boost your physical state.

### **Senior hair care tips:**

- Take hair vitamins if needed. Many seniors have thinning hair that lack vitamins and shine. Vitamins can help seniors get hair-specific nutrients for healthier and thicker hair.
- Use the right hair products. For thinning hair, don't use heavy gels and mousses. Instead, choose products that thicken hair and add volume. If your scalp is dry, try a moisturizing shampoo that treats dry scalps.
- Avoid applying heat to your hair. Rollers, curling irons, straighteners, and blow dryers apply heat to your hair, which can damage it over time. You should consider a heat-protection product if you do apply heat on your hair every day.
- When outside, wear a hat. Your hair can be damaged by sun exposure and strong winds.
- Brush your hair when it is dry. Wet hair can be tougher to comb through, resulting in more breakage.

## DENTAL

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This aspect of senior care should never be forgotten. However, seniors may experience more dental problems like dry mouth and periodontal disease. In addition, dental care can impact heart disease, gum disease, and diabetes!

### **Guidelines for senior dental care:**

- Brush twice a day
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush
- Use fluoride toothpaste
- Try an electric toothbrush
- Floss once per day
- Rinse with an antiseptic mouthwash
- Clean dentures daily
- Drink water that contains fluoride (most tap water does)
- Visit the dentist regularly

These are just some aspects of personal care for seniors that can contribute to overall health. If you have difficulty with personal care, our caregivers can help! They are available 24/7 and can assist you with your personal care needs. Like your hair done a certain way? No problem! We listen attentively to your preferences so that you can remain happy at home.

Be sure to take care of your body as you age, by consistently performing activities that engage the mind, strengthen muscles, and nourish the body.

Seniors who follow these tips may not completely avoid hospitalization; however, these tips may help keep you from suffering a serious accident, injury, or illness.

Discover additional resources to keep you healthy, happy, and at home by visiting [caringseniorservice.com](https://www.caringseniorservice.com)

