

Ask the Expert at Stony Brook University Hospital

I just turned 50. What can I do to stay healthy and age gracefully?

Eat Right and Maintain an Active Lifestyle

Aging does not have to be “downhill” from age 50 and beyond. Good diet, exercise, mental stimulation and socialization can result in successful aging. Research shows that how we age depends not only on our genes, but how well we take care of ourselves. We can take a cue from Madam Jeanne Calment, the oldest human being. She lived to the age of 122 years because she had “good genes” and because she ate right and exercised regularly. She took fencing lessons until age 90, rode a bicycle until age 100 and ate a diet rich in olive oil.

Watch Your Weight

Many people gain weight with middle age. It is estimated that about 60% of people between 50 and 60 years are overweight. At Stony Brook University Hospital, we often see that certain diseases such as diabetes and heart disease are associated with weight gain. With obesity comes functional decline, so it is important to maintain a good diet and exercise. The National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute website posts a healthful diet recommended for Americans with high blood pressure called the DASH diet (www.nhlbi.nih.gov). The National Institute on Aging has published a free exercise guide for anyone who wants to take those first steps



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toward a more active lifestyle (www.niapublications.org/exercisebook/exercisebook.asp).

See your Doctor for Regular Check-ups

Many people attribute their physical symptoms to old age, when actually these may be signs of diseases that occur with higher frequency in the elderly. We now know for example, that “senility” is not part of the normal aging process, but rather a symptom of dementia. Regular visits to your doctor for screening tests such as

mammograms and colonoscopies may detect diseases at an early stage, when treatment can make a difference.

Remember, the keys to aging successfully are:

- Making healthy lifestyle choices, such as eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly.
- Seeing your doctor regularly for age-appropriate screening tests. Don't assume every ache and pain is due to “normal” aging.

For more information about screening tests or maintaining a healthy lifestyle, call Stony Brook University Hospital at (631) 444-4000.

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