

Newsflash

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Walk Your Way Into 2021

People 65 and older who walked at least six to nine miles a week cut their risk of developing memory problems later in life compared with people who walked less, according to a recent study.



Can walking lower breast cancer risk?

It well might. In a 17-year study of 73,615 postmenopausal women conducted by the American Cancer Society, those who reported walking for at least 7 hours a week were 14 percent less likely to develop breast cancer compared with women who walked for 3 hours a week or less. And the most active women – those who engaged in not just walking but more vigorous forms of physical activity – had a risk that was 25 percent lower. Earlier studies have also linked physical activity to a reduced risk of breast cancer in women after menopause.

Are You Better Than Average?

To find out how long you'll live, find out how fast you walk.

Your walking speed and ability to rise from a chair are surprisingly effective at predicting your longevity. In a study of more than 3,000 healthy retirees, for example, those with the slowest gait were about 50 percent more likely to die within seven years. Take these tests to see how you compare.

WALKING SPEED. In a hallway, mark start and finish lines six meters (19 feet, 8 inches) apart. Have a partner time you. Walk briskly but don't run, and stride past the finish line without slowing. Divide the time in seconds by six to get meters per second.

Average: *0.9 meters per second for people over 50.*

ONE-LEG BALANCE. With bare feet, stand with your arms folded across your chest. Raise one foot slightly off the ground and have someone start a stopwatch, stopping when you uncross your arms, move the leg you're standing on, or touch the raised foot to the floor. (Stand next to a counter or piece of furniture.)

Average: *43 seconds for 18- to 39-year olds; 40 seconds for 40- to 49-year-olds; 37 seconds for 50- to 59-year-olds; and 27 seconds for 60- to 69-year-olds. (With eyes closed: 9 seconds for 18- to 39-year-olds; 7 seconds for 40- to 49-year-olds; 5 seconds for 50- to 59-year-olds; and less than 3 seconds for those older than 60.)*

CHAIR STANDS. *(for people 70 and older)* Stand up from a chair five times in a row as quickly as possible without stopping. Keep your arms folded across your chest, come to a full standing position each time, and sit all the way down each time. The clock should be stopped when your bottom hits the seat the fifth time.

Average: *14.28 seconds for women and men.*

SIT-UPS. *(for people younger than 70)* Lie on your back with your knees bent at a right angle and your feet flat on the floor. Place your hands palms down on the ground next to your body, and with your lower back kept flat on the ground, curl up your shoulders so your fingers slide forward about 3.5 inches, then return your shoulders to the floor. Count the number you can complete in one minute.

Averages for women: *25 for women 40 to 49; 31 for those 50 to 59; and 12 or those 60 to 69.*

Averages for men: *33 for men 40 to 49; 39 for those 50 to 59; and 18 for those 60 to 69.*

Drive Safely and Comfortably When You Hit the Road

Even healthy adults with a safe driving record tend to make more driving errors as they age. This can include potentially dangerous mistakes such as failing to check blind spots, according to previous research. However, self-regulating your driving may help you to improve your safety on the roads, and maintain your independence.

Normal aging can cause various declines in brain functioning and physical ability, and those changes can affect driving skills, including the ability to focus through distractions, make quick decisions, and avoid other vehicles or pedestrians. However, there are measures you can take to stay out of trouble.

Physical limitations: Decreased strength, flexibility and coordination, as well as conditions like arthritis, can make continuing to drive difficult. Arthritis in particular can limit your ability to move your shoulders, hands and neck. This means you may have trouble looking over your shoulder before changing lanes, and grasping and turning the steering wheel. Arthritis in the knee can impede you switching your foot from the gas to the brake pedal, and depressing the brake sufficiently in an emergency stop.

SAFE DRIVING TIPS

- **Ask your doctor** about treatments that can help alleviate any joint pain, swelling, and stiffness without making you drowsy.
- **If your existing car is large** and difficult to maneuver, consider downsizing.
- **Modify your car** by adding larger wide-angle side and rear-view mirrors that minimize blind spots (although you should always still check your blind spots before making a maneuver).
- **If you have arthritis in your hands**, use a steering wheel cover that helps you grip and handle the wheel.

Cognitive changes: To drive safely, you need to constantly process and react to driving conditions and challenges. Unfortunately, cognitive changes as we age can make us more easily confused and more likely to fail to react or compensate if something out of the ordinary happens while we're driving

SAFE DRIVING TIPS

- **Maintain a safe distance** between your car and the vehicle ahead of you, so that you'll have more time to slow down or stop when necessary.
- **Minimize left turns.** Drivers age 65 and older are involved in a larger proportion of crashes involving left-hand turns. If possible, use routes that involve few left turns, or use intersections with designated left-hand turn lanes controlled by traffic lights.
- **Eliminate distractions** inside the vehicle. Adjusting the radio, using a cell phone, and chatting with passengers can distract any driver.
- **Plan your route before leaving** if you're driving anywhere unfamiliar, in order to avoid last-minute decisions about how to reach your destination. Also try to ensure the route uses quieter local roads instead of busy highways. Consider using a GPS device to plan routes, but plot your route on a map too.
- **Avoid driving in peak hour traffic.** More vehicles on the road mean a greater likelihood of collision.

Sensory changes. Age-related changes in vision and hearing can impact driving ability. Cataracts and other age-related changes in the eyes may result in a need for brighter lights to see. But they can also make an older adult oversensitive to headlight glare at night. Along with this, many older adults suffer from hearing impairment that could mean that they are unable to hear high-pitched tones, such as sirens from emergency response vehicles, car horns, and railroad warnings.

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Drive Safely *(cont'd from previous column)*

SAFE DRIVING TIPS

- **Sit high enough** in your seat so you can see the road for at least 10 feet in front of your vehicle.
- **On bright, sunny days**, wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun's glare.
- **Avoid driving at night** if at all possible, or consider using a cab.
- **If driving at night is unavoidable**, compensate for reduced visibility by decreasing your speed, and increasing your following distance to four or more seconds behind any vehicles ahead of you. Stay aware of the reflective lane markings, and use them to guide you.
- **Don't be blinded by oncoming cars.** If an oncoming vehicle is using high beams, slow down, look down toward the right side of the road to avoid being blinded, and use the lane marking to help you stay on course until the oncoming vehicle passes.
- **If you use hearing aids**, always wear them while driving.
- **Don't have the radio volume turned up too high** in your car.

Happy New Year!

