

Newsflash

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A Surprising Benefit of Fun

Being social may help you get more physical activity without formal exercise. In a study of 313 older adults, people wore activity monitors and reported on groups they socialized with, their daily activities and their moods for five to six days. Those with the most acquaintances (not best buddies, but people they met socially) logged the most activity. Participants with the closest relationships reported the best moods.

*Courtesy of Journals of Gerontology Series B:
Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*



Should You Worry About Shark Attacks?

Probably not. In the U.S., the odds are less than 1 in 1 million, while the odds of drowning are 1 in 1,134. Still, it's smart to swim with others, stay close to shore, avoid swimming at twilight or at night, swim without shiny jewelry, and, if you have a cut that's bleeding, stay on land.

Courtesy of PLOS One

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8 Major Summer Health Hazards

It feels like the dog days of summer are just beginning. But with the warmer temperatures, days swimming at the beach, campfires, hikes, and barbecue grills come plenty of summer hazards. Here are eight major summertime hazards to look out for and tips for staying healthy, safe, and happy all season long.

1. **Sudden Drowning.** As far as summer tragedies go, accidental drowning strikes almost every tourist, lake, and beach resort yearly in the United States. **Tip:** Drowning can be prevented by wearing life jackets (especially on boats), never swimming inebriated, and by utilizing swimming safety tools (i.e., water wings) in water as well as the buddy system.
2. **Food Poisoning.** Summer is the season of communal and outdoor cooking, leaving about 48 million Americans with food poisoning, and 128,000 hospitalized due to food borne illness. **Tip:** Cook and grill meats thoroughly, keep food prep surfaces clean and sanitized, and don't leave food out in warm temperatures where bacteria will grow.
3. **Sunburn.** The sun's ultraviolet rays are powerful, which leaves everyone at risk for painful and damaging sunburn and associated skin blistering and cancer — regardless of skin type. **Tip:** Apply 30+ sunscreen every few hours, more often following a swim or sweaty day. Wear a wide-brimmed hat, dark sunglasses, and seek shady spots for added sun protection.
4. **Contaminated Public Swimming.** The great thing about public swimming areas like the community pool or beach, is that everyone can take a cool refreshing dip on hot summer days. However, shared swimming spaces are often contaminated with all sorts of bacteria that can live for days and cause all sorts of skin, eye, gastrointestinal, and inner ear chaos and infections if accidentally absorbed by the skin, or worse, swallowed. **Tip:** be sure to take a thorough shower both before and after swimming.
5. **Heat Stroke.** Heat is a real killer—causing roughly 700 heat-related deaths annually in the U.S. **Tip:** All age groups can suffer heat stroke. If you feel cramps, exhaustion, and rash set in, take a break, find a shady spot, and hydrate immediately. Drink more water and take it easy on hot, humid days.
6. **Fireworks.** You might consider fireworks safety common sense, however, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission roughly 200 people visit the emergency room each year with fireworks-related injuries over the July 4th holiday. **Tip:** Attend professional community fireworks shows and always stand clear to prevent hands, eyes, face, and finger injuries.
7. **Lightning Storms.** Even though your odds of being struck by lightning are quite low (only 1 in 500,000) you increase your risk if you continue to work, play, or swim outdoors during a lightning storm. **Tip:** If a thunder storm begins, get out of the pool and off the golf course immediately.
8. **Barbecue-Grilling.** Grill fires and outdoor cooking mishaps (from campfires or BBQs) account for numerous deaths and injuries, and extensive home-owner damage each year according to statistics from the National Fire Protection Association. **Tip:** Keep safety in mind this grilling season by only using charcoal and propane BBQ grills outside, well away from the house or deck, and well away from children and pets. A grill should never be left unattended for any reason.

Lose Weight the Right Way

Dropping extra pounds at any age can improve your health. Here's what works.

Many people call a truce with the battle of the bulge at a certain age, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. When you're over 60, being a little overweight may be beneficial, because being underweight increases the risk of malnutrition, osteoporosis, and falls. But you don't want to be carrying too much excess weight. If you're very overweight or obese, you're more likely to develop chronic diseases earlier in life. And obesity makes it more difficult for older people to do daily activities.

Weight gain with age is common. Your metabolism gradually slows down. Sarcopenia, a decrease in muscle tissue that occurs with age, is a likely cause – but not the only one. People generally become less active as they get older, even more so if they have orthopedic or other painful health issues. When you're not burning as many calories but still eating the same amount, you gradually gain weight. Prescription medications may also play a role. Psychotropic drugs – particularly certain classes of antidepressants and antipsychotics – and corticosteroids (often prescribed for anti-inflammatory diseases) can lead to substantial weight gain.

SMALL CHANGES, BIG BENEFITS. You probably don't have to lose as much weight as you think you do to do improve your health. Simply maintaining a healthy weight – or dropping just a few pounds if necessary – can be worthwhile. Losing just 5 to 8 percent of your weight (about 11 to 17 pounds for a 220-pound person) improves your health and how well you function. The effect can be considerable. A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that people who lost 7 percent of their weight had a 58 percent lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

WHERE TO START. To get the scale to budge, you can't just cut calories. Unless it's coupled with an exercise program, weight loss will result in muscle loss. That's why the best strategy combines calorie-burning, muscle-building exercise, and diet changes. In a study in the journal *Obesity*, half the people who took a similar approach kept off at least 5 percent of the weight they lost for eight years.

Changing a diet has to be something you can stick with long term because if you return to the way you were eating before, you'll likely gain back the weight. To eat more healthfully, follow the MyPlate for Older Adults guidelines from Tufts University: Half of every meal should be fruits and vegetables; one-quarter grains, such as brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-wheat bread; and one-quarter protein (some of it dairy). Use oils and other fats like butter sparingly.

Next, try to eat fewer calories and burn more through exercise. Simple changes such as cutting out sugary drinks, switching from whole to 1 percent or nonfat dairy products, and making half of every meal fruit or vegetables helps. Walking for half an hour torches about 140 calories, depending on your weight. If you create a 500-calorie deficit every day, you should lose about 1 to 2 pounds a week. Women need at least 1200 calories per day, men at least 1300. When you don't eat enough calories it's tough to get all the nutrients your body needs.

MEET GOALS FOR NUTRIENTS. One key must-have in that department: protein. As you age, your body needs more protein to stimulate muscle protein synthesis. Shoot for 0.6 to 0.7 grams of protein per pound of body weight daily. To hit the target, eat beans, dairy, eggs, fish, lean meat, or poultry at each meal.

Vitamin B12, vitamin D, and calcium are also important. Vitamin B12 helps maintain red-blood and nerve cells, and assists in the production of neurotransmitters (chemicals that relay signals between your brain and other parts of your body). It becomes harder for the body to absorb B12 with age. Vitamin D and calcium are crucial for building and preserving bones, and they may be key for muscle health, too.

Egg yolks contain small amounts of vitamin D, and fatty fish like mackerel, salmon, and tuna are among the best sources. Dairy products are rich in calcium; it's also found in leafy green vegetables such as bok choy and kale. For vitamin B12, fortified cereals, seafood, and meat are good sources.

The Exercise Connection

Aerobic activity, such as walking or cycling, is tops for calorie burning, but strength training may actually be more crucial for keeping off weight as you age. After midlife, you lose 5 to 10 pounds of muscle per decade, which dramatically reduces how many calories your body burns. Resistance training helps offset that loss, and research shows that your resting metabolic rate stays elevated 5 to 9 percent for up to 72 hours after a session. That means if you work out with weights on only two days, you'll reap the rewards of an elevated metabolism all week long. Put a routine together with these tips from Westcott.

Design Your Plan

Choose three lower-body moves (legs and glutes); three for your upper body (back, shoulder, arms, and chest); and two or three for your core (abs and lower back). In Westcott's research, people did the following exercises: leg extensions, leg curls, leg press, chest press, lat pulldowns, shoulder press, abdominal curls, low-back extensions, and torso rotations. A trainer can guide you or you can design a routine by using the online library of the American Council on Exercise, at acefitness.org.

Choose Your Resistance

Bands, medicine balls, strength-training machines, or free weights such as dumbbells all work equally.

Use enough weight. Do 8 to 12 repetitions of each move. If you can't do eight reps, you're using too much resistance. When you're able to do more than 12 reps, add 5 percent more weight.

Repeat the suggested reps of each exercise once. Rest 90 seconds to 2 minutes, then do another set. Do the workout twice per week.

Columns 1 & 2 Courtesy of CR On Health

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