

FOUR COMMON HEALTH CONCERNS:

EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON ARTHRITIS, DIABETES, OSTEOPOROSIS AND FALLS

With age often comes an increase in aches and pains. Age-related issues like arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis and falls aren't always preventable, but you can reduce your risks with a few tips from local health-care providers.

1 ARTHRITIS

"Arthritis is a normal part of the aging process. The most common form of arthritis — osteoarthritis — is a thinning of the natural cushion or cartilage where bones meet," explains Dr. Daniel Severance, orthopedic surgeon at Prevea Regional Orthopedic Center.

"The biggest risk factor for osteoarthritis is weight," says Dr. Vaida Stoik, physician at Aurora BayCare Medical Center, "which is a good thing, since it is modifiable. Losing one pound takes about four pounds of pressure off the knees."



"For patients struggling with osteoarthritis, it's often a vicious cycle," says Dr. Stoik. "Exercise hurts, but ultimately physical activity helps people reduce risks and manage symptoms. Walking is as good for the body as running. Water-based activities also takes pressure off of the joints."

DIABETES

"By maintaining a healthy BMI, between 18.5 and 25, and following a routine that includes regular aerobic exercise, we can reduce blood sugar levels and the risk for diabetes," says Dr. Kristen Lindgren, functional medicine physician at Prevea Health.

"Type 2 diabetes is really a disease of diet which develops as the result of insulin overproduction from the overconsumption of carbohydrates, like refined sugars and processed grains," explains Dr. Lindgren.

Confused about carbohydrates? Dr. Lindgren recommends a Mediterranean diet, which reduces refined carbohydrates and includes lots of vegetables, lean proteins and healthy fats.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Like arthritis and diabetes, osteoporosis risks decrease when people exercise regularly and make healthy food choices.

Supplementation can also help.

"Milk is not the best source of calcium since pasteurization destroys up to 32 percent of the available calcium, vitamin K, and magnesium," explains Dr. Lindgren. "Try adding appropriate amounts of nutrients required for building bone such as vitamin D3 — your level should be checked and an optimal range is 50-80 — and calcium — calcium citrate is one of the best absorbed forms of calcium."

FALLS

"Falls are especially dangerous for people who have osteoporosis," says Shari Van Straten, orthopedic registered nurse at Prevea Regional Orthopedic Center. She suggests being evaluated and screened for low bone density to identify risk factors.

"Most falls, broken bones and serious life-changing injuries occur in the home setting. When older people experience these accidents, they often lead to the tragic loss of independence and mobility," adds Van Straten.

Like other age-related issues, exercise can help obviate fall risks, if people work with their bodies rather than against them.

Bonnie Murray, instructor and lifeguard at the Aquatic Center at CP in Green Bay, explains water exercise is a perfect remedy for many age-related problems. "When a body is submerged in water, its natural buoyancy supports the body's weight," she says.

"This takes stress off the joints."

Whether you're worried about risk factors or struggling with any of these conditions, it's not too late to tweak your routine. Try replacing refined grains with whole wheat or ancient grains and adding a water aerobics class to enhance your balance while decreasing your weight circumference. You may be surprised how much younger you'll feel. **u**

