



How to Talk to Your Doctor About Aging

Getting older, though experienced differently by everyone, often comes with shared confusion when faced with the problem of how to best take care of an aging body. Luckily, no one has to face this problem alone. One of the best resources for understanding how to shape your lifestyle and where to focus your attention as you age is, unsurprisingly, your doctor. This guide will help you to plan some topics of conversation for your next doctor's appointment, as well as give you an idea of the type of answers to expect.

One topic that many people often forget the importance of is medical testing. Many tests that are not routine for younger adults become routine as patients get older. For example, at age 50 it becomes routine to get a colonoscopy every 10 years to monitor changes in your digestive system that can lead to colorectal cancer and other diseases. Some patients, however, with outstanding complications such as a family history of intestinal disease will require a different schedule than the average patient. For this reason, make sure to ask your doctor about what kinds of tests you will need to get in the coming years, what they are for, and how often you will need them.

As was briefly mentioned in the previous paragraph, certain people have greater risk for specific diseases than the average person based on their medical and family history. To find out if there are any conditions you should be extra cautious about, ask your doctor how any preexisting conditions may impact your health in the future, and what steps you can take to avoid that.

As most people already know, exercise and diet are major factors when it comes to staying healthy. While there are plenty of people ready to give health advice when it comes to these topics, your doctor can help you to separate the good advice from the bad. If you have dietary restrictions it is especially important to talk with your doctor to make sure you are getting proper nutrition despite your augmented diet. Ask your doctor for ideas about creative ways to stay active, how much activity is enough, and what types of exercise you should be engaging

in. Additionally, you may want to talk with your doctor about how your diet may be impacting your health now and in the future. Make sure to discuss all aspects of your diet that may be relevant, especially alcohol, cholesterol, and water consumption.

If you or a loved one is/are beginning to have difficulty living alone, it may be time to talk with a doctor about options for care. It is normal for adults reaching advanced age to find more difficulty living alone or with an elderly spouse and as care becomes a more difficult challenge to take on alone, the need for an outside caregiver may increase. There are many options available when planning current and future care for an elderly family member, and these can be discussed with a doctor to find the one that suits you the best. Ask your doctor about ways to plan for future care, different care options, and about long-distance caregiving if this is relevant to you. Finally, it can often help one's peace of mind to talk with their doctor early on about potential end-of-life care. Planning for the time surrounding death may seem morbid now but can save heaps of stress down the line. You may wish to ask your doctor about similarities and differences between palliative care and hospice care to plan which will be the better fit for you.

Talking through these topics with your doctor will give you a better understanding of what to expect as you progress into the next part of life, as well as how to remain healthy throughout. For more information about aging, as well as many other health-related topics of interest, visit www.nia.nih.gov (the National Institute on Aging) or www.healtheo360.com.