



GoodHealthOutcomes.org
A Telehealth Company for Select Customers
1317 Edgewater Drive Suite 5236
Orlando, FL 32804
Voice 904.590.9598, Fax 317.342.5462
Email: Contact@GoodHealthOutcomes.org

Healthy Aging: Optimizing Health for Women Over 65

Entering the senior years brings a welcome shift in focus from reproductive health to longevity, vitality, and preserving independence. For women over the age of 65, optimizing health means proactively protecting bone density, maintaining cardiovascular strength, managing cognitive wellness, and adjusting medication safety.

Vital Screening Timelines for Senior Women

Routine screenings change after age 65. Work with your provider to keep these updated on your preventive checklist:

- **Bone Density (DEXA Scan):** All women should receive a baseline DEXA scan at age 65 to check for osteoporosis. Your results will determine if you need repeat scans every 2 to 5 years.
 - **Breast Cancer (Mammograms):** Continue receiving a screening mammogram every 2 years through age 74. After age 75, discuss with your provider whether to continue based on your overall health.
 - **Colorectal Cancer:** Regular screening is strongly recommended through age 75. From ages 76 to 85, the decision to screen is individualized based on your health history.
 - **Cardiovascular & Diabetes Metrics:** Monitor your blood pressure annually (or track it at home using your [Home Diagnostic Kit List](#)). Ensure your cholesterol and A1C (diabetes) levels are checked every 1 to 3 years.
 - **Sensory Exam Updates:** Schedule annual vision and hearing exams. Addressing vision changes and hearing loss early drastically reduces the risk of cognitive decline and accidental falls.
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Essential Pillars of Physical Vitality

Protecting Your Bones and Joints

With the post-menopausal drop in estrogen, bone thinning accelerates.

- **Nutritional Support:** Women over 65 need 1200 mg of calcium daily alongside Vitamin D3 to ensure absorption. Prioritize calcium-rich foods like leafy greens, fortified almond or dairy milks, and sardines. NOTE: our bodies absorb only about 500mg of calcium at a time, so be sure to break up your calcium supplements to twice daily rather than a single 1200mg dose.
- **Strength Training Is Essential:** To maintain balance and bone density, pull or push against resistance. Incorporate strength training (weights or resistance bands) at least twice a week, combined with walking, to stimulate bone strength and preserve muscle mass.

Core Cardiovascular and Metabolic Habits

- **Hydration Management:** The body's natural thirst mechanism declines with age. Practice structured hydration—sipping water, broths, or herbal teas throughout the day—rather than waiting until you feel thirsty. Review the [Home Management of Dehydration](#) guide to recognize early warning signs like dizziness.
 - **Heart-Healthy Movement:** Aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity (like brisk walking, swimming, or water aerobics) per week to keep arteries flexible and support healthy blood pressure.
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Medication Safety: What to Look For

As the metabolism slows down, the way your liver and kidneys process medications changes. Review your medicine cabinet annually to remove high-risk substances:

Avoid Diphenhydramine (Benadryl): As emphasized in your resource on [Five Common Medications to Avoid](#), older adults clear diphenhydramine very slowly. It can cause severe side effects, including confusion, dry mouth, urinary retention, blurred vision, and a significantly higher risk of falling.

Use Caution with NSAIDs: If you manage arthritis pain with Ibuprofen or Naproxen, do so sparingly. Overusing NSAIDs increases the risk of stomach ulcers and can impair kidney function. Review your [Pain Management Guide](#) and talk to your provider about safer long-term alternatives like topical pain gels.

Cognitive and Mental Wellness

Maintaining brain health and emotional well-being is just as vital as physical fitness.

- **Cognitive Stimulation:** Keep your brain resilient by learning new skills, reading, solving puzzles, or staying active in social clubs.
 - **Prioritize Social Connection:** Isolation is a major risk factor for depression and cognitive decline in women over 65. Schedule regular check-ins with family, volunteer, or join community groups to stay connected.
 - **Mental Health Check-Ins:** Mood changes, persistent sadness, or severe anxiety are not "normal parts of aging." If you feel overwhelmed, utilize telehealth or local groups for supportive care.
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The Senior Wellness Strategy: Use your next annual wellness visit to perform a comprehensive "Medication Cleanout." Evaluate the use of all your prescriptions, supplements, and over-the-counter bottles to ensure every item is still serving your longevity goals safely.

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP