

How late is too late to break bad habits?

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Research linking bad habits such as smoking and the direct impact on a senior's health will be presented during the American Geriatrics Society's Annual Meeting April 29 - May 3 in Chicago, IL. The study followed more than 2,000 seniors who were current smokers, past smokers and had never smoked. All three groups were compared to show a link between smoking and the speed at which participants walked. After five years, it was discovered that smokers showed a significantly slower pace in their gait than those who had previously smoked. These study results suggest that even at an older age, changing bad habits such as smoking can positively impact a senior's health later in life.

Eliminating bad habits such as poor food choices and lack of exercise - which can lead to weight gain or poor muscle condition - has been an ongoing struggle for [seniors](#). And, according to Alison Moore, M.D., member of the American Geriatrics Society (AGS), the most important part of successfully changing bad habits is to go into the transformation with a positive attitude.

Dr. Moore offers the following suggestions to help [older adults](#) conquer some of the more common bad habits:

Bad [Food Choices](#): Excess weight can cause multiple health problems and complications, including diabetes, heart disease and stroke. Substituting good carbohydrates (sweet potatoes, wheat bread, brown rice) for bad carbohydrates (white potatoes, white bread, white rice) and adding lean proteins, while limiting foods with high fat and sugar contents, will help seniors maintain a healthy weight.

Smoking and Drinking: Smoking and excessive alcohol intake is proven to have negative health effects on a person at any age, but seniors who smoke and drink regularly increase their chances of more advanced medical problems. The effects of many medications are altered when mixed with alcohol, which can pose serious health risks, especially for seniors taking multiple medications.

"Couch Potato Syndrome": As people age, they often slow down and feel like they can't do as much as they did when they were young. While physical activity sometimes becomes restricted due to health ailments, that doesn't mean the brain needs to slow down. There are a variety of activities seniors can do to keep their minds focused and sharp, including word puzzles, interactive games, joining a book club or participating in other social and volunteer activities.

Adjusting Medications: The majority of seniors are on multiple medications and sometimes find it difficult or too bothersome to remember when and which medications to take each day. As a result, some seniors "adjust" their daily medication routine without talking to their physicians. To help keep medications organized and alleviate frustration, seniors should use weekly or monthly pill boxes and have a family member or friend help them fill pill boxes on a regular basis or make a color coded chart to help keep track of their pills and the times they need to be taken.

Lack of Exercise: Keeping physically active is integral to keeping the heart, mind and bones healthy. For some seniors, physical restrictions make exercise a challenge, but there are still small ways to incorporate physical activity into a daily routine, such as parking further away from the store to get in a short walk. And, programs such as yoga, Pilates or Tai Chi can help with balance and weight loss and can be adapted to all levels of physical ability.

Source: American Geriatrics Society

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