

Diseases through the decades – here's what to look out for in your 40s, 60s, 80s and beyond

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Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight will set you up for decades of better health. Credit: [Sue Zeng](#)

Many diseases develop and become more likely as we age. Here are

some of the most common conditions, and how you can reduce your risk of getting them as you clock over into a new decade.

In your 40s

Maintaining a healthy weight can reduce the risk of developing arthritis, coronary heart [disease](#), and other common and related conditions, including back pain, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and many cancers. But [almost one-third of Australians](#) in their 40s are obese and [one in five](#) already have arthritis.

From the age of 45 (or 35 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders), [heart health checks](#) are recommended to assess [risk factors](#) and initiate a plan to improve the health of your heart. This may include [changing your diet](#), reducing your alcohol intake, increasing your physical activity, and improving your well-being.

[Checks to identify your risk of type 2 diabetes](#) are also recommended every three years from age 40 (or from age 18 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders).

If you don't already have symptoms of arthritis or if they're mild, this decade is your chance to reduce your risk of the disease progressing. Focus on the manageable factors, like shedding excess weight, but also on improving muscle strength. This may also help to prevent or delay [sarcopenia](#), which is the decline of skeletal muscle tissue with ageing, and back pain.

Most people will begin to experience age-related vision decline in their 40s, with difficulty seeing up close and trouble adjusting to lighting and glare. A [baseline eye check](#) is recommended at age 40.

In your 50s

In your 50s, major eye diseases become more common. Among Australians aged 55 and above, [age-related macular degeneration](#), cataracts, diabetes-related eye diseases and glaucoma account for more than 80% of [vision loss](#).

A series of health screenings are recommended when people turn 50. These [preventive measures](#) can help with the early detection of serious conditions and optimising your treatment choices and prognosis. Comprehensive eye assessments are recommended every one to two years to ensure warning signs are detected and vision can be saved.

National cancer screening programs for Australians aged 50 to 74, are available every two years for [bowel](#) and [breast](#) cancer.

To screen for bowel cancer, older Australians are sent a test in the post they can do at home. If the test is positive, the person is then usually sent for a colonoscopy, a procedure in which a camera and light look for abnormalities of the bowel.

In 2016, 8% of people screened had a positive test result. Of those who underwent a colonoscopy, [1 in 26](#) were diagnosed with confirmed or suspected bowel cancer and one in nine were diagnosed with adenomas. These are potential precursors to bowel cancer which can be removed to reduce your future risk.

To check for [breast cancer](#), women are encouraged to participate in the national mammogram screening program. [More than half \(59%\)](#) of all breast cancers detected through the program are small (less than or equal to 15mm) and are easier to treat (and have better survival rates) than more advanced cancers.

In your 60s

Coronary heart disease, [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (a disease of the lungs that makes breathing difficult), and lung cancer carry the [biggest disease burden](#) for people in their 60s.

If you're a smoker, quitting is the best way to improve both your lung and heart health. Using evidence-based methods to quit with advice from a health professional or [support service](#) will greatly improve your chances of success.

The build-up of plaques in artery walls by fats, cholesterol and other substances (atherosclerosis) can happen from a younger age. But the hardening of these plaques and narrowing of arteries, which greatly increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, is most likely to occur from age 65 and above.

Exercise protects against atherosclerosis and research consistently shows any physical activity is better than nothing when it comes to heart health. If you're not currently active, gradually build up to the recommended 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise on most, preferably all, days.

Other potentially modifiable risk factors for stroke include [high blood pressure](#), a high-fat diet, alcohol consumption, and smoking.

Your 60s is also a common decade for surgeries, including joint replacements and cataract surgery. Joint replacements are typically very successful, but are [not an appropriate solution for everyone](#) and are not without risks. After a [joint replacement](#), you'll benefit from physiotherapy, exercise, and maintaining a healthy weight.

The treatment for cataracts is to surgically remove the cloudy lens. Cataract surgery is the most common elective surgery worldwide, with

very low complication rates, and provides immediate restoration of lost vision.

In your 70s

Many of the conditions mentioned above are still common in this decade. It's also a good time to consider your risk of falls. [Four in ten people in their 70s will have a fall](#) and it can lead to a cascade of fractures, hospitalisations, disability and injury.

[Osteoporosis](#) is one cause of falls. It occurs most commonly in post-menopausal women but almost one-quarter of people with osteoporosis are men. Osteoporosis is often known as a silent disease because there are usually no symptoms until a fracture occurs. Exercise and diet, including calcium and vitamin D, are important for bone health.

Older people are also vulnerable to mental health conditions because of a combination of reduced cognitive function, limitations in physical health, social isolation, loneliness, reduced independence, frailty, reduced mobility, disability, and living conditions.

In your 80s and beyond

Dementia is the second most common chronic condition for Australians in their 80s, after [coronary heart disease](#) – and it's the [most common for people aged 95 and above](#).

[Many people think](#) dementia is a normal part of the ageing process, but [around one-third of cases of dementia could be prevented](#) by reducing [risk](#) factors such as high blood pressure and obesity at mid-life.

Early diagnosis is important to effectively plan and initiate appropriate

treatment options which help people live well with dementia. But dementia remains [underdiagnosed](#).

Around 70% of Australians aged 85 and above have [five or more chronic diseases](#) and take multiple medications to manage these conditions. Effective medication management is critical for people living with multiple [conditions](#) because medications for one condition may exacerbate the symptoms of a different coexisting condition.

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