

Living 50 Plus

News and Information for Nash County Seniors

RISK LESS. DO MORE

What older adults should know

(Family Features) Even though cooler days may seem far off, now is the best time to plan ahead for a healthy winter. One common respiratory illness, respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms, but it can be severe and even deadly for older people.

“As we grow older, our immune systems do not work as well and we are more likely to have chronic conditions, which means we are at increased risk of getting very sick from common viruses as we age,” said Alison Bar-koff, who leads the Administration for Community Living within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“Getting vaccinated is the best protection against fall respiratory viruses like RSV. It can help keep symptoms mild and help keep people out of the hospital.”

Here’s what older Americans should know about RSV and vaccines this fall, according to the Risk Less. Do More. Public Education Campaign.

Prevention is key.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone 75 years and older get an RSV vaccine. Also, people between 60-74 should get vaccinated if they have conditions such as heart or lung disease, diabetes, obesity or a weakened immune system. The vaccine cuts the risk of hospitalization from RSV by at least half.

People living in nursing homes, assisted living or other long-term care facilities are at even higher risk. There are many people living together in these facilities who have medical conditions that make them more likely to get very sick. While vaccines may not always stop infection, they can prevent severe illness. So, vaccination is very important for residents of long-term care facilities.

RSV vaccines are available.

Three RSV vaccines have been approved for older adults by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. You only need a single dose that you can

get at any time of the year, but getting the vaccine in the early fall offers the best protection for the late fall and winter, when RSV usually peaks. Getting the vaccine early gives your immune system enough time to build up protection.

RSV vaccines are the best protection.

The RSV vaccines have gone through extensive testing. Last year, more than 20 million older adults were vaccinated safely. Mild side effects, such as pain, redness or swelling at the injection site sometimes happen, but they usually go away on their own in a few days. Serious allergic reactions from RSV vaccines are rare.

Prevention is the best option.

Respiratory virus vaccines, including RSV vaccines, can help protect older adults from serious illness.

Talk to your doctor and visit [cdc.gov/RSV](https://www.cdc.gov/RSV) to learn more.

The link between sleep and healthy aging

A good night’s rest can be just what the body needs to feel revitalized and ready to tackle a new day. Indeed, rest is important for people of all ages, including seniors.

The National Council on Aging notes the brain needs sleep to regulate the body, restore energy and repair damage. Recognition of that is vital for aging men and women, some of whom may be more vulnerable to sleeping problems than they realize. In addition to being more vulnerable to age-related health problems that can interrupt their sleep, thus affecting its quality, aging men and women may find their sleep routines change over time. For example, a 2019 study published in the journal BMC Geriatrics found that active elderly people reported it took them longer to fall asleep as they got older.

The NCOA says it’s a misconception that older adults need more sleep than younger people, noting adults of all ages require the same amount of nightly rest. However, things may change for seniors in regard to how much time they need to spend in bed. The NCOA notes this is because adults may be more likely to experience poor sleep quality and continuity. When that occurs, adults still need the recommended minimum of seven hours of nightly sleep, but they may need to spend more time in bed since it’s taking them longer to fall asleep.

It’s important that aging adults recognize that they can spend too much time sleeping as well. A 2019 study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society found that too much sleep is linked to the same health problems as too little sleep, issues that include an elevated risk for heart disease and falls.

Sleep issues affecting older adults also may be a byproduct of various contributing factors. The NCOA notes that frequent contributors to sleep concerns include:



- Pain that affects the back, neck, or joints
- Mental health issues, including anxiety and depression
- Neurodegenerative disorders that are more frequent among aging populations, such as dementia and Alzheimer’s
- Sleep apnea or disordered breathing at night

Restless leg syndrome, a condition that tends to worsen with age and is characterized by an urge to move limbs often

- Nocturia, a condition marked by a need to urinate at night
- Stimulating medications or medication interactions

- Decreased exposure to sunlight
- Sedentary lifestyle

Aging men and women who are experiencing difficulty sleeping should know that such issues are treatable and not something that needs to be accepted as a normal part of growing older. For example, individuals whose sleep is routinely interrupted by a need to urinate can avoid certain beverages, including alcohol and caffeinated drinks.

Sleep and healthy aging go hand in hand. Aging adults experiencing difficulty sleeping can consult their physicians and visit [ncoa.org](https://www.ncoa.org) to learn more about overcoming sleep-related issues.

Senior-friendly interior renovations

Home is where the heart is. That sentiment may be especially true for seniors who have spent decades living in their homes. A lot of hard work goes into home ownership, and seniors who have lived in the same space for a while undoubtedly have countless memories within the walls of their homes.

A lifetime of experiences in a home can make it hard to leave, but many seniors experience diminished mobility as they age. Mobility issues can make it hard for seniors to traverse their homes, but aging homeowners can make various renovations to make a home more accessible.

• Revamp entryways and staircases. A 2020 study of 1,000 adults in the United Kingdom found that 28 percent of individuals age 65 and older who don’t exercise regularly struggle with activities like walking up stairs. The study, commissioned by Total Fitness, also found that 14 percent of men and women over 65 who regularly engage in moderate exercise still find it challenging to climb up and down a flight of stairs. Seniors facing similar challenges can install a ramp at their home’s entryway so they can comfortably go in and out. Inside, a chair lift can ensure seniors are not struggling to move from one floor to another.

• Raise the outlets throughout the home. They’re easily overlooked, but outlets, particularly those outside the kitchen, tend to be close to the floor. AARP notes that’s no accident, as outlets are generally placed at a height equal to the length of a hammer to save time with measuring when buildings are being constructed. Outlets close to the floor can be difficult for seniors with mobility issues to reach. Relocating the outlets a little higher off the floor is not an expensive renovation, but it can make a home more accessible for seniors who have difficulty bending down or getting down on one knee.

• Install door knob extensions. Verywell Health notes that nearly half of all people age 65 and older have arthritis or another rheumatic condi-


tion. Arthritis can make it difficult for seniors to grip and turn door knobs. Door knob extensions can make it easier for seniors with arthritis to open the doors in their homes. Such extensions are roughly five-inch levers that can be installed over an existing door knob, making it easier to grab and pull down. Extensions save seniors the hassle of turning the knob, which some may find painful and almost impossible.

• Renovate the bathroom. Bathroom renovation projects can be costly, but seniors with mobility issues should know that bathrooms can pose a particularly dangerous threat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that roughly three million older adults are treated for fall injuries in emergency departments each year. A 2019 analysis published in The Journals of Gerontology noted that 22 percent of in-home falls resulted in a change in the person’s walking ability. Replacing a step-over shower with a zero-step alternative can make it easier for seniors



with mobility issues to get in and out of the shower, thus reducing their risk for falls. Grab bars along shower walls and a chair inside the shower can make it easier to bathe and towel off safely.

Seniors with mobility issues can make their homes more accommodating through an assortment of simple, yet effective renovations.



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Aging individuals' calorie needs affected by activity levels

Healthy aging is a multifaceted process that involves an array of variables. Diet and exercise are two such variables, and each are intertwined. According to the National Institute on Aging, the amount of calories individuals over 60 need each day depends on their physical activity levels. Though all adults should aspire to be physically active each day, some aging adults may experience mobility issues that make it hard to move around. But activity levels can serve as a measuring stick for daily calorie in-

take. The NIA notes that the more active men and women over 60 are, the more calories they will need to consume.

- **Inactive:** The NIA recommends that women over 60 who are not physically active consume 1,600 calories per day. Men over 60 who are not physically active are urged to consume between 2,000 and 2,200 calories each day.

- **Moderately active:** What qualifies as moderate physical activity is best defined by an individual's physician, who may recommend

various exercises or activities based on each person's condition. Daily walks may qualify as moderate physical activity, but aging adults are urged to keep track of the length and intensity of such walks so they can work with their physicians to determine how they might affect their daily caloric intake. Women over 60 who engage in moderate physical activity each day are urged to consume 1,800 calories per day, while men in that category should consume between 2,200 and 2,400 calories.

- **Very active:** Aging men and women can probably determine on their own if their lifestyle can be described as very physically active. Women over 60 who qualify as very active should consume between 2,000 and 2,200 calories per day, while the NIA advises very active men to consume between 2,400 and 2,600 calories per day.

Of course, it's important that men and women over 60 choose the right foods each day as well. The NIA advises against choosing foods that have a lot of



sugar, saturated fat and sodium. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are examples of healthy foods that can

help aging individuals reach recommended daily calorie intake without compromising their overall health.

Recognize the risk factors for AFib

A healthy heart is vital to a long life. Aging individuals recognize that link, and many take steps to protect their heart health, which may include changing their diets or exercising with greater frequency.

Recognizing certain threats to heart health is another important step individuals of all ages can take as they seek to live long, healthy lives. One such threat is atrial fibrillation, which is often referred to as "AFib." Johns Hopkins medicine notes AFib is a type of abnormal heartbeat caused by extremely fast and irregular beats from the upper chambers of the heart. Johns Hopkins notes a person with AFib may have a heart that beats more than 400 times per minute, which is caused by faulty electrical signals that make

the atria (the two upper chambers of the heart) contract much faster than normal.

The American Heart Association reports that AFib increases the risk of heart-related death and stroke. But individuals may be curious about their risk for AFib. Though some of the risks for AFib, such as family history, may be beyond an individual's control, others can be managed with the goal of reducing the likelihood of developing the condition. The AHA notes that people who have one or more of the following conditions are typically at higher risk for AFib.

- **Age:** Age is a significant risk factor for AFib. Johns Hopkins notes that adults older than 50 are at elevated risk for AFib. In addition, the AHA reports that medi-



cal researchers suspect the number of AFib cases will rise considerably in the coming years as people are living longer. Recognition of age as a significant risk factor for AFib might compel more individuals to take additional risk factors for the condition more seriously.

- **High blood pressure:** The AHA reports that long-

standing, uncontrolled high blood pressure can increase a person's risk for AFib. This link between AFib and high blood pressure underscores the need for annual health examinations, which often uncover the condition known as "the silent killer" due to the fact that it does not necessarily produce noticeable symptoms.

- **Alcohol consumption:** Binge drinking increases risk for AFib, according to the AHA. The organization defines binge drinking as five drinks in two hours for men and four drinks in two hours for women. If individuals want to consume

alcohol, Johns Hopkins emphasizes the need for moderate consumption, which is defined as one drink or less per day for women or two drinks or fewer per day for men.

- **Activity levels:** Though physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle, the AHA notes that AFib is common in athletes. The condition can be triggered by a rapid heart rate known as a supraventricular tachycardia, which can be a byproduct of exercise.

AFib can pose a serious threat to individuals from all walks of life. Recognition of that threat and how to reduce AFib risk can be part of anyone's long-term health regimen.

ACS releases breast cancer report

The American Cancer Society reports that approximately 30 percent of postmenopausal breast cancer cases can be attributed to potentially modifiable risk factors. That finding, cited in the organization's "Breast Cancer: Facts & Figures, 2022-2024" report, means as many as three in 10 breast cancer diagnoses in postmenopausal women may have been attributable to variables within patients' control. The ACS notes such variables may have included body weight, alcohol consumption and physical activity levels. The same report also notes that certain modifiable risk factors accu-



mulate over the course of a woman's life, meaning both postmenopausal women and younger women could potentially lower their risk for breast cancer by making

a concerted effort to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, reduce alcohol consumption and embrace a physically active lifestyle.

AFib is more common among men

Atrial fibrillation, often referred to as "AFib," is more common among men than women. Johns Hopkins Medicine notes AFib is caused by extremely fast and irregular beats from the upper chambers of the heart. Males are more likely than women to develop AFib, though that does not mean the condition is not a threat to women. In fact, age is a significant risk factor for AFib, and a report from Henry Ford Health noted that women tend to

live longer than men, which could explain why there were more women living with AFib in 2020 than there were men. The condition also manifests differently in men than women. HFH notes that high blood pressure and heart valve disease are more likely to lead to AFib in women, while coronary artery disease and a history of heart attack are most common risk factors for AFib in men.

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