

# HOW TO AVOID SERIOUS ILLNESS

A large number of people 65 years and older have at least one chronic health condition. Major chronic diseases include diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, heart disease and stroke. These conditions often have no early signs or symptoms, yet can result in complications, hospital admissions and affect a person's function.

Apart from adopting a healthy lifestyle (don't smoke, be physically active and eat a healthy diet), health screening can detect early disease and might even save your life. Early treatment prevents the risk of serious complications if the condition is managed properly.

## **What is Health Screening?**

Health screening involves a doctor taking a detailed medical history and examination, together with blood tests or other procedures and x-rays which will determine if you have a particular disease or condition. Not all tests are necessary or helpful (e.g., testing for the whole series of cancer markers), and your doctor will be able to advise you on the types of tests needed.

## **Recommended Screening and Frequency**

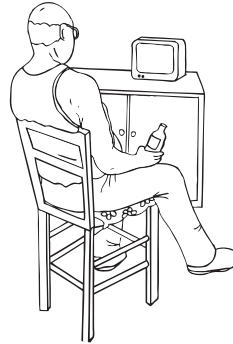
Go for health screening at private clinics, polyclinics or hospitals if you fall into the following groups:

- Have a family history of chronic disease or cancer.
- Adults aged 40 years and above.

# HEALTH DAMAGING BEHAVIOURS



Smoking



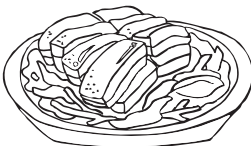
Lack of exercise



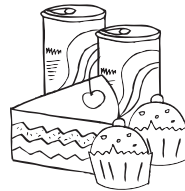
Drinking excessive alcohol



Eating processed food



Eating fatty food



Eating sugar-laden food

## Recommended Health Screening Table

DISEASE OR CONDITION	RECOMMENDED AGE FOR SCREENING	RECOMMENDED FREQUENCY FOR SCREENING	SCREENING TEST
Obesity	18 years and above.	Once every year.	Body Mass Index (BMI).
High blood pressure	40 years and above.	At least once a year or whenever you see your doctor.	Blood Pressure (BP) measurement.
High blood cholesterol	40 years and above.	Once every 3 years if the first screening is normal.	Fasting blood lipids test.
Diabetes	40 years and above.	Once every 3 years if the first screening is normal.	Fasting blood glucose test.
Colorectal cancer	50 years and above if no other risk factors.  Those who have a family history of colorectal cancer must start screening at an earlier age and greater frequency.	Fecal occult blood test every year.  Sigmoidoscopy every 5 years.  Colonoscopy when either test positive.  Alternatively, colonoscopy every 10 years starting at 50.	Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT).  Sigmoidoscopy.  Colonoscopy.
<b>FOR WOMEN ONLY</b>			
Cervical cancer	Women ages 25 – 65 who are sexually active.	Once every 3 years.	Pap smear.
Breast cancer	40 – 49 years.	Once every year.	Mammogram.
	50 years and above.	Once every 2 years.	
Osteoporosis	Women over 50 years or post-menopausal.	Osteoporosis Self-Assessment Tool (OSTA) for Asians (based on age and weight) is able to categorise women into high, moderate and low risk.  OSTA – see: <a href="http://www.osteoporosis.org.sg">www.osteoporosis.org.sg</a> <a href="http://www.hpb.gov.sg">www.hpb.gov.sg</a>	Bone Mineral Density (BMD) is measured for women at high risk.
<b>FOR MEN ONLY</b>			
Prostate cancer	Men above 50 years or earlier in those with a family history of prostate cancer.	Once a year.	Digital Rectal Examination (DRE) and Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test.

Reference: HPB Online.

### **National Screening Programme Available Locally**

- Integrated Screening Programme (ISP) – subsidised programme for Singaporeans aged 40 years and above to screen for diabetes, hypertension, high blood cholesterol, obesity and cervical cancer.
- CervicalScreen Singapore (CSS) – subsidised pap smear screening for cervical cancer is available at polyclinics for women 25 – 65 years.
- BreastScreen Singapore – mammography for the detection of breast cancer is offered at a subsidised rate at some polyclinics.

*Reference: HPB Online.*

### **Other Preventive Measures for Those Aged 65 Years and Above**

#### **Promote Wellness and Independence**

- Speak to your doctor about screening for common conditions that affect the older person which can interfere with his ability to remain independent.
- These include vision or hearing problems, unstable gait with risk of falls, urinary incontinence, problems with memory, depression and malnutrition.

#### **Immunisations**

Those over 65 years should receive the following:

- Annual influenza vaccination.
- At least one pneumococcal vaccination; if you are over 75 years or have severe chronic disease and were vaccinated more than five years ago, you should be re-vaccinated.
- Booster dose of tetanus and diphtheria.

### **Healthy Diet**

- Encourage a balanced diet high in fruits and vegetables and low in fat.
- Older adults should have daily calcium intake of 1,500mg a day with 400 – 800 IU of vitamin D.
- Look out for teeth problems and/or poor fitting dentures which may contribute to poor food intake.

### **Exercise**

- Sedentary elders should be urged to increase their level of physical activity to promote better sense of well-being, increase energy level, improve mobility and decrease risk of heart disease and osteoporosis.
- Walk briskly 30 minutes a day for 4 – 5 days a week.

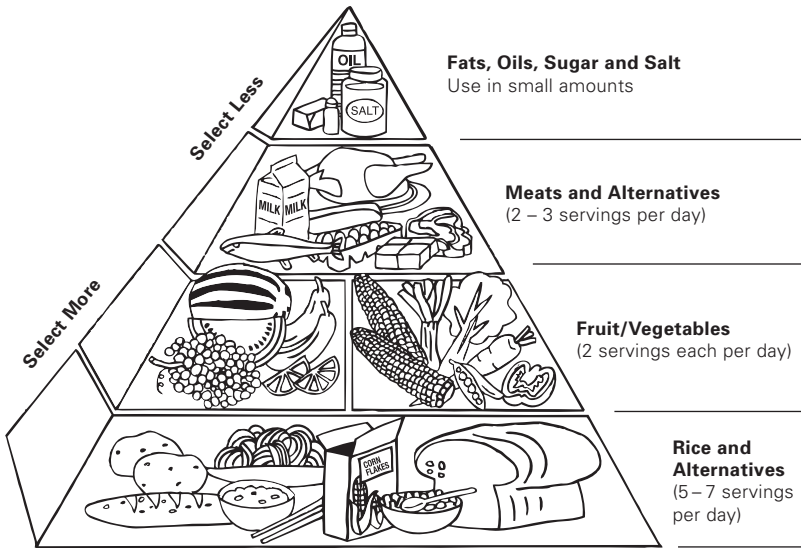
### **Stop Smoking**

- Benefits of discontinuing smoking extend even to individuals over age 65 years.
- Cessation at any age decreases the risk of chronic lung disease, many cancers and heart disease.
- The risk of heart disease from smoking falls as soon as one stops smoking, no matter how long or how much the person smoked before.
- In five years, the ex-smoker is not much more likely than the non-smoker to have heart disease due to cigarette smoke.

### **Maintain Social Interaction and Network**

- Studies suggest that social support systems, ability to cope with stress, lifelong learning, meaningful activity and laughter may contribute as much if not more to longevity than healthy behaviours.

# HEALTHY DIET



Ensure that their food intake is rich in vitamins, proteins and carbohydrates. A healthy and nutritional diet goes a long way in keeping the body and mind fit. Drink 6 – 8 glasses of water a day.

*Reference: HPB Online.*