

## Healthy Aging: The 60s -- A New Beginning

FRIDAY, Dec. 30 (HealthDay News) -- Despite their best intentions, many Americans will reach retirement age flabby, out of shape and worried about their health.

But by age 60, is it too late to turn things around?

"It's never too late," said Dr. Sharon Brangman, chief of geriatrics at the State University of New York's Upstate Medical University in Syracuse. "Go to your doctor, get a checkup, pay attention to any chronic problems you might have. Most of all, make sure you're an aggressive and active participant in getting all your health needs addressed."

Exercise should be the foundation of any get-healthy plan at this -- or any other -- age, said Brangman, who's also a member of the American Geriatrics Society.

"It doesn't have to be training for a marathon," Brangman noted. Walking, swimming, any kind of movement will do, and ideally every day. "I always advocate free weights, too, because they help improve muscle mass and bone -- that's important for fighting aging," she said

Give those workouts the right fuel, too. "We should be eating a diet low in saturated fat and high in fish, leafy greens, vegetables, fruits and whole grains," Brangman said. Many of these foods contain powerful antioxidants that boost cardiovascular health while fighting off cancer and even aging.

Brangman especially loves omega-3 fatty acids -- found in certain fish and fish oil supplements -- because of their healthy effects on the cardiovascular system. "And whatever you do to keep your heart healthy is also good for your mind," she pointed out, since "it's the same kind of blood vessels that are feeding your brain."

Of course medicines can help, too -- drugs like cholesterol-busting statins are useful, especially combined with a healthy diet and regular exercise. But Brangman worries about medicine cabinets chock-full of drugs.

"I have so many patients that come in and they simply don't know what they are taking," she said. Too often, older patients are seeing a myriad of doctors, each prescribing separate medications.

"Make sure that there's one physician that's looking at the entire medication list. And as a patient, try and make sure you know what you are taking and why, what the side effects might be and if there might be interactions with other medications," Brangman advised.

Alternative therapies can be helpful, she said, but they also can have "very potent" ingredients that can interact with other drugs, so always inform your doctor. Hormone supplements -- such as estrogen for women or testosterone for men -- are currently not recommended, except for particular patients as advised by their physician.

And don't forget the importance of friends.

"Staying engaged with the world around you and avoiding social isolation -- that can really exercise the brain and keep people strong," Brangman said.

"In fact, many people are finding they don't even want to retire -- that old stereotype of moving to Florida and playing Bingo has changed," she said. For many of today's 60-somethings, "retirement" may mean a reduced work schedule, or off-and-on contract work.

"There's a lot more benefits to work than just making a paycheck," Brangman said. "We're starting to realize it has real health value for older patients."