

FACT SHEET

What women in their 70s and up need to know



Medical studies have shown that having pets can lower blood pressure, shorten hospital stays and encourage social interaction among older people. Call your local animal shelter for more information about **adopting a pet**.

AARON STRONG / Liaison International

U.S. DEATHS in 1995

from cardiovascular disease:

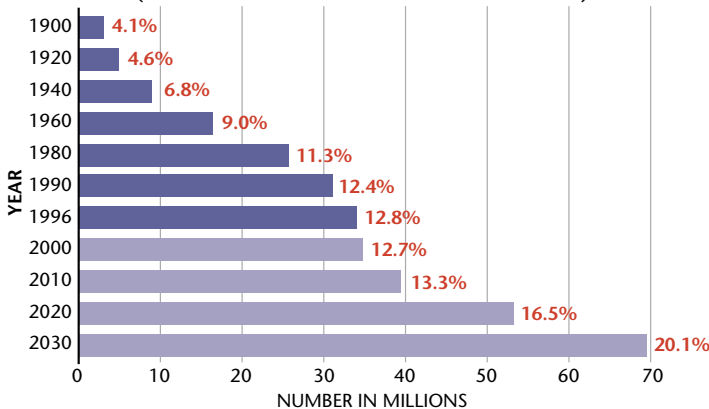
455,152 men
505,440 women

from cancer (all forms):

281,611 men
256,844 women

Do you know the difference between a nursing home and an **assisted-living facility**? The Department of Health and Human Services operates a directory assistance service to help older people find answers to their questions and locate resources in their community. Call 800-677-1116 or check out <http://www.ageinfo.org/elderloc/elderloc.html> on the World Wide Web.

NUMBER OF AMERICANS AGED 65 OR OLDER (PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION IN RED)



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Choose one **pharmacy** that you can go to consistently for all your medications. If the pharmacists get to know you, they'll be aware of all the drugs you're taking and may be able to alert you if you begin taking medicines that aren't compatible with one another.



Are you not enjoying retirement? Planning some new activities could make you feel better. But if not, speak up—you may be suffering from depression. Your doctor might be able to help by prescribing antidepressant medication or recommending a psychotherapist.

CHECKUP

Essential medical exams for women in their 70s and up

VACCINATIONS

Every year 50,000 to 70,000 Americans die from diseases that could have been prevented by vaccinations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults age 65 and older receive vaccinations against tetanus every 10 years, an annual shot against influenza and a vaccine against pneumonia. The Administration on Aging also suggests that people who have blood-clotting disorders or who require kidney dialysis be vaccinated against hepatitis. Vaccinations aren't just for kids—if you have questions, call the CDC at 800-CDC-SHOT.

COST: The cost for each vaccination is different but should be covered by insurance.

EYE EXAM

Although eyes commonly weaken with age, many diseases of the eye can be effectively treated if caught early. The National Eye Institute recommends an eye exam once every two years for everyone older than 60 and once a year if you're diabetic. The eye doctor will test your eyesight and your glasses and should check for glaucoma, cataracts and macular degeneration (the deterioration of the central part of the retina). If you begin to notice changes in your eyesight, the National Institute on Aging suggests adding brighter lights in your home—it may help you see better for reading and other tasks and should help prevent accidents.

COST: \$50–\$100

DENTAL EXAM

Losing your teeth is not a natural part of aging. Schedule annual dental appointments to keep your teeth healthy. And if you wear dentures, you still need to go in: have your dentures professionally cleaned and adjusted for fit regularly or if your weight changes by more than 10 pounds or so.

COST: \$60–\$200

Don't suffer in silence from urinary incontinence. At least one out of 10 people over age 65 in the U.S. suffers occasional lack of **bladder control**. If you begin to experience problems, see your doctor: incontinence is very often treatable.

Women who smoke have

6% less

bone mass by age 80 than women who don't smoke.

(British Medical Journal, October 1997)

SPL/Photo Researchers Inc

Are you **WEB-savvy**?

SeniorNet is a nonprofit organization that offers classes around the country for older Americans who want to learn about computers and the Internet. Call 415-352-1210 to find the center nearest you. Or if you're on-line and want to learn more, visit their site at <http://www.seniornet.org/index.html> on the World Wide Web.

For people between 65 and 84 years old, falls are the second leading cause of death from injury and the foremost cause for those 85 years and older. Fractures occur in 5 percent of all falls; hip fractures are the most serious of injuries and result in the greatest number of deaths.

✓ HEART DISEASE SCREENING

Doctors rely on a variety of tests to look for heart disease, the leading killer of women (and men) in the U.S. Have your cholesterol and blood pressure checked regularly. If your doctor suspects heart disease, she may refer you for one or several of the following tests: an electrocardiogram (which measures electrical activity of the heart); a stress or treadmill test (which records heartbeat during exercise); nuclear scanning (which can show damaged areas of the heart); or coronary angiography (which examines coronary arteries).

COST: Variable

✓ COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING

Physical inactivity and older age are two risk factors associated with cancers of the colon and rectum, so continue to schedule regular exams to screen for these diseases. The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends a few options, including a digital rectal examination, fecal occult blood tests, sigmoidoscopy (inspection of the lower large intestine) and colonoscopy (inspection of the entire large intestine); ask your doctor which is appropriate for you. Symptoms of colorectal cancer may include changes in bowel habits for more than a few days, rectal bleeding and, in some patients, cramping or stomach pain.

COST: Variable; be sure to find out which tests are covered by your insurance.

✓ MAMMOGRAM

According to the National Cancer Institute, one in 14 women will develop breast cancer by age 70; by age 80 the number increases to one in 10. Schedule an annual mammogram—the earlier you detect breast cancer, the better.

COST: \$50–\$150

✓ SKIN EXAM

Keep up your annual skin examinations to check for skin cancer. In addition, your skin may be more sensitive these days—to sunlight, bruises, sores and dryness. Be aware of exposure to the elements and keep your skin clean and well moisturized.

COST: Included in a routine visit to the doctor.

✓ BONE DENSITY EXAM

Some 20 million American women are affected by osteoporosis. Ask your doctor if you should have a bone density scan, which is an x-ray of your bones that can detect bone loss. Your doctor may recommend hormone therapy or other drugs, diet changes or exercise to increase the mass and strength of your bones. For more information on osteoporosis, call the National Osteoporosis Foundation's Official Action Line at 800-464-6700.

COST: \$100–\$300. Medicare pays in some states. But beware, not all private insurers will cover this test; ask before you go to the doctor.

✓ PELVIC EXAM AND PAP TEST

Although your risk of developing cervical cancer doesn't increase with age, the risk of ovarian cancer does. Half of all women diagnosed with ovarian cancer are older than 65, according to the ACS, and the pelvic exam is the only way to catch this disease early. The ACS recommends an annual pelvic exam and Pap test to screen for these cancers.

COST: Pelvic exam \$40–\$100; Pap test \$20–\$60. Usually covered by insurance.

✓ HEARING TEST

More than one third of all Americans between the ages of 65 and 74 experience some natural hearing loss, but you can get help. If words become hard to understand or if you begin to hear hissing or ringing noises in the background, find an audiologist and have your hearing tested.

The audiologist will measure your ability to hear sounds at different pitches and volumes and may suggest a hearing aid to help amplify the sounds coming into your ear. And because there are different types of hearing loss, there are different types of hearing aids. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) has a guide to choosing hearing aids on the Internet, complete with their descriptions and prices; visit the site at http://www.asha.org/consumers/brochures/hearing_aid.htm on the World Wide Web. Call the ASHA at 800-498-2071 for more information or to find an audiologist in your area.

COST: Hearing test \$10–\$100

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