Preventive Health Recommendations
Guidelines for Patients Ages 65 and Over
Introduction

This booklet contains recommendations and guidelines for your continued health, safety, and well-being.

Please take a few moments to read this booklet.
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Injury Prevention

You can reduce your risk of injury by following these safety tips:

**Buckle up. A seat belt can save your life.**

*Seat belts can greatly reduce your chance of death or injury.* Why risk it? Buckle up with both lap and shoulder belts every time you are in the car. Ask those who ride with you to buckle up.

A helmet can prevent a serious head injury.

*If you ride a bike, motorcycle, or all-terrain vehicle, you run the risk of a serious head injury, permanent brain damage, or death.* Wearing an approved safety helmet will lower your risk of injury or death from head trauma by 85 percent.

For more information on seat belts or helmets, contact the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation at 1-800-932-4600 or visit their Web site at www.dot.state.pa.us.

**Gun-related accidents can be prevented.**

*The number of gun-related accidents is on the rise.* Since firearms are dangerous, safety must be your number one concern when handling any type of firearm.

If you own a gun, you must keep it unloaded and locked away in a place where children can’t get to it.

For information about gun safety, contact the National Rifle Association at 1-800-392-8683 or visit their Web site at www.nra.org.uk/.
Smoke detectors can protect you from serious burns, injuries, or even death.

Every year home fires kill thousands of people and damage or destroy more than 500,000 homes. You can protect yourself by taking the following precautions:

• Install smoke detectors. Change batteries twice yearly.
• Have a fire escape plan.
• Buy a fire extinguisher. Look for “ABC” on the label to be sure it will work on all kinds of fires.
• Look for fire hazards in your home and correct them promptly.
• Have your furnace checked annually.

For a fire safety inspection or further information, call your local fire department.

Carbon monoxide detectors can prevent death.

Carbon monoxide interferes with the delivery of oxygen throughout the body and can cause unconsciousness and even death. The gas is odorless, colorless, and may cause the following symptoms: headache, nausea, dizziness, weakness, confusion, disorientation, and fatigue.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in homes — near sleeping areas, furnaces and hot water heaters, gas appliances, fireplaces, and wood or coal stoves. They should be placed at eye level or higher for the most effective detection.

For more information about carbon monoxide detectors, contact the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772 or visit their Web site at http://cpsc.gov/.
Injury Prevention (continued)

Accidents are more common and serious for older adults

Take the following precautions:

• Check your home for safety hazards such as untacked carpet edges or rugs. Make sure electrical cords are safely away from the sink. Stairs should have handrails that are solid and easy to grasp.

• Install grab bars and nonskid mats in your bathrooms.

• Avoid wearing only socks, smooth-soled shoes, or slippers on uncarpeted floors or stairs.

• Drive safely. If driving becomes difficult, limit the distance and times when you drive. Evening and rush hour are the most hazardous times to drive. Winter weather can make driving even more dangerous. If you are having difficulty seeing while driving, have your vision checked.

• Use medications safely. It’s a good idea to use a chart or special reminder container. These containers can be purchased at a pharmacy.

• Prevent hot-water burns by setting your water heater at 120° F (49° C).

• Be sure household members are trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). This is a lifesaving technique that can revive a person whose heart and lungs have stopped working.
Making Medical Decisions in Advance

*Make medical decisions in advance.* Many people would not want their doctors to continue treatment to keep them alive if they were terminally ill or in a coma. Some *would* want to continue life-sustaining measures. You should make your wishes known to someone close to you. This person should be chosen to make these decisions in the event you are unable to do so. You should also complete a living will or advance directive. Ask your doctor for help with advance directives.

The staff at your doctor’s office can provide a copy of a living will that you can complete on your own. If you have a living will, you should give your doctor a copy.
Making Smart Choices

Make smart choices for good health. Don’t let tobacco use, excessive alcohol use, illegal drug use, or risky sexual behavior put your health in danger.

Tobacco Use

*Three million people die each year as a result of smoking.* There is no safe way to smoke. Some people try to make their smoking habit safer by smoking fewer cigarettes or switching to brands with low tar and nicotine. Even when used in small amounts, all cigarettes can cause damage to your body.

*Smoking causes disease.* If you smoke, you are more likely to die at a younger age. Smoking can cause cancer, osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke, and lung diseases like chronic bronchitis or emphysema. Smoking is not just harmful to you, it is harmful to those around you too.

*Smoking is addictive.* Some people find smoking enjoyable. This short-term pleasure does not outweigh the harmful effects. The nicotine in cigarettes is addictive. Nicotine is a drug. It is just as addictive as heroin, cocaine, or alcohol.
Cigar smoking, pipe smoking, chewing tobacco, and dipping snuff can be dangerous too.

Smoking one cigar is equal to smoking two and a half cigarettes. Even smoking a few cigars puts you at risk for lung, mouth, lip, and throat cancer.

Chewing tobacco and dipping snuff puts cancer-causing chemicals into contact with your gums, cheeks, and gastrointestinal tract.

Even if you don’t find a problem today, see your dentist or doctor frequently to have your mouth checked. Your chances for a cure are better if oral cancer is found early.

Where to go for help. It’s hard to fight any addiction, and smoking is no different. More than 40 million Americans have successfully quit smoking, and you can too. Even if you are over 65, and have been using tobacco for many years, remember it’s never too late to quit. The good news is that if you want to stop smoking, there are medications, therapies, and smoking cessation classes available to help you.

Contact UPMC Health System at 412-647-UPMC (8762) or, toll-free, 1-800-533-UPMC (8762) or visit our Web site at www.upmc.edu for more information on smoking cessation classes.

For further information, contact the American Cancer Society at 412-919-1100 or visit their Web site at www.cancer.org/.

Smoking is not just harmful to you, it is harmful to those around you too.
Making Smart Choices (continued)

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Many serious diseases are caused by having sex with someone who has the disease. A disease you can catch as a result of having sex is called a sexually transmitted disease (STD). You can get STDs, including HIV, if you have unprotected sex. It is estimated that each year there are 12 million new infections of STDs. STDs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, hepatitis B, genital herpes, and HIV. An estimated one million Americans are currently infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. If untreated, these diseases can lead to serious health problems, infertility, and in some cases, death.

All kinds of people get STDs. You can’t tell if someone has an STD just by looking at him or her. Some people will show no outward signs or symptoms. Having sex just one time with an infected partner can give you an STD.

For more information, contact:

- Allegheny County Health Department STD Clinic
  412-578-8082
  www.county.allegheny.pa.us

- AIDS Information Line: 412-578-8081
  No appointment is needed to get free, confidential testing and treatment.

- Pittsburgh AIDS Center for Treatment (PACT)
  412-647-PACT (7228) (for confidential testing)
  412-647-3112 (for counseling)

- National AIDS Hot line: 1-800-342-2437
  www.ashastd.org/nah/
STD Risk-Reduction Guide:

• The only way to be 100 percent safe from STDs, HIV, and AIDS is not to have sex and to completely stay away from street drugs.

• To lower your risk, have sex with one partner only, who has no other partners and who has never used street drugs.

• Talk to your partner about his or her past sexual history and drug use before you decide whether to have sex.

• Agree to use a female or male latex condom properly each time you have sex. Condoms form a barrier to STDs and HIV for both partners.

• Don’t take illegal intravenous drugs. If you do, don’t share needles.

• If you are being treated for an STD, tell all your partners so they can get checked and treated. Early treatment of STDs can prevent problems for you later. Most STDs can be cured or managed. If you are concerned that you have been exposed, speak to your doctor.
Making Smart Choices (continued)

Alcohol and Drug Use

Heavy drinking and drug use can lead to health and family problems.

Drugs and alcohol damage your judgment. This can lead to injuries and accidents. Problem drinking or drug use can also lead to family problems, legal and job difficulties, or health problems like liver disease.

If you answer “yes” to any of the following questions, you may have a problem with alcohol.

• Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking?
• Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
• Have you ever felt guilty about your drinking?
• Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

The best way to avoid these problems is to not drink alcohol at all. But if you do drink, limit your intake to no more than 14 drinks per week for men and seven drinks per week for women. You should also limit your intake at one time to no more than four drinks for a man and three drinks for a woman.

If you feel that you may have a drinking or drug problem, speak to your doctor. For further information, contact:

• Alcoholics Anonymous: 412-471-7472
  Web site: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/
• Narcotics Anonymous: 412-391-5247
  Web site: www.na.org/
Protecting Yourself

*Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse*

*The need to feel safe in your home.* Do you live in fear of a spouse, child, or friend? If you’re feeling unsafe in your own home, learn what domestic violence is, why it should be stopped, and what you can do to stop it. Violence includes physical assault, verbal abuse, having objects thrown at you, or being threatened. Living with abuse can be emotionally draining and physically dangerous, and older adults are particularly vulnerable.

*Take action if you or a family member is the victim of abuse.* With the support of other relatives, friends, or community support groups, you can find the help you need.

Speak with your health care provider and/or call any of the following numbers. They answer 24 hours a day to help victims of violence or sexual abuse:

- Women’s Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh 412-687-8005
- Pittsburgh Children and Youth Services 412-350-5701
  Web site: www.county.allegheny.pa.us/dhs
- Center for Victims of Violent Crime (for victims of sexual and violent crimes) 412-392-8582
Living a Healthy Lifestyle

**Eating for Good Health**

*Eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise can reduce health risks like heart disease and help you maintain your ideal weight.* A poor diet and lack of exercise can lead to weight gain and health problems. These health problems can include high blood pressure, diabetes, early heart disease, and certain types of cancer.

We recommend the following guidelines:

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Maintain or improve your weight by eating the recommended calories for your age and height.
- Eat calcium-rich foods like fat-free milk, low-fat or non-fat yogurt, or low-fat cottage cheese to protect your bones. Below are recommended daily amounts of calcium:
  - **Ages 51 and above — 1,200–1,500 mg**
- Choose a diet with plenty of grain products (bread, cereal, pasta, and rice), vegetables, and fruits.
- Choose a diet low in fat and cholesterol. Limit your intake of fried foods, butter, lard, shortening, egg yolks, mayonnaise, fatty meats and cheeses, poultry skin, olives, avocados, and foods made with palm or coconut oil.
- Choose a diet moderate in salt, sodium, and sugar.
- Eat three meals a day.
Losing control over eating may be a sign of an eating disorder. Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns about your eating habits. For more information, contact UPMC Nutrition Services at 412-692-4497, or Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic’s Eating Disorders Unit at 412-624-5420.

**Exercise**

*Regular exercise has many benefits.*

You should accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five to seven days per week. Always consult your doctor before starting any exercise program.

The potential benefits from regular exercise are to:

- maintain or reduce your weight
- reduce stress
- control blood pressure
- positively influence diabetes control
- increase muscular strength, endurance, and flexibility
- positively affect osteoporosis and increase bone strength
- control cholesterol levels

A poor diet and a lack of exercise can lead to weight gain and health problems.
Living a Healthy Lifestyle (continued)

*We recognize that eating a healthy diet, losing weight, and starting an exercise program can be difficult.* For nutrition information contact:

- UPMC Nutrition Services
  412-692-4497
- Nutrition Information of the American Diatetics Association
  1-800-366-1655
  Web site: www.eatright.org/
- UPMC Weight Management Center
  412-624-2339
  Web site: www.upmc.edu/weightloss/
- American College of Sports Medicine
  317-637-9200
  Web site: www.acsm.org/
- American Council on Exercise
  1-800-825-3636
  Web site: www.acefitness.org/
- Cardiopulmonary Rehab
  Call 1-800-533-UPMC (8762) for the nearest location.

**Dental Health**

Neglecting your teeth can result in tooth decay, gum disease, and other problems that can affect your mouth.

To prevent problems:

- Floss regularly and brush your teeth daily with fluoride toothpaste.
- Reduce your intake of sugary foods.
- See your dentist regularly. If you have not seen your dentist within the last year, call and make an appointment.
For financial assistance for senior dental care, contact the Pennsylvania Dental Association at 1-800-692-7256 or visit their Web site at www.padental.org.

For more information about dental health, contact the American Dental Association at 312-440-2500 or visit their Web site at www.ada.org/

**Mental Health**

*Stress can lower your resistance to disease.* Pressures, demands, and worries that make you feel tense are a part of life, but they can affect your physical and emotional health. Learn how to manage stress effectively.

Depression is a medical illness and is not a character defect or weakness that can be wished away. It is not a normal part of aging.

During the past month, have you been bothered a lot by:
- little interest or pleasure in doing things
- feeling down, depressed, or hopeless

If you answered “yes” to either of these questions, you could be experiencing depression. Other medical conditions and some medications can imitate symptoms of depression. Let your doctor know if you answered yes to either of these questions. If your doctor finds that you are depressed, he or she can tell you about several treatment options. Then you and your doctor can begin to plan the treatment that is best for you.

For more information on depression, contact the National Institute of Mental Health at 301-443-4513 or visit their Web site at www.nimh.nih.gov. Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic of UPMC Presbyterian offers a variety of mental health services. Call 412-624-2100 for information or visit their Web site at www.upmc.edu/wpic/.
Living a Healthy Lifestyle (continued)

Health Screenings

The earlier a disease is found, the better the chances for successful treatment and possible cure. This is sometimes referred to as “early detection.” Early detection is especially important in the treatment of many forms of cancer.

If you are a female:

- Examine your breasts monthly. Have your doctor perform a clinical breast exam each year.
- Routine mammograms are recommended for women ages 50 to 65 and for many women ages 65 and older, especially if you are on hormone replacement treatment.
- Pap smears may not be needed after age 65 if you are at low risk; ask your doctor.

Hormone replacement for menopausal women is a personal decision. Your doctor can provide more information on this topic.

After menopause, most women experience bone loss. This can eventually lead to osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become more fragile. As it progresses, fractures can occur, especially in the spine, wrists, and hipbones.

You may be susceptible to osteoporosis if you:

- are postmenopausal
- are Caucasian or Asian
- have thin bones
- smoke or drink
- have a family history of osteoporosis
Osteoporosis can be prevented by:

- increasing your calcium intake. We recommend 1,200 mg daily for women over 51, or 1,500 mg daily if you are not on hormone replacement therapy.
- exercising regularly
- avoiding smoking, heavy alcohol use, and falls
- taking estrogen

Protect your future. Talk to your doctor about bone loss. For further information, contact:

- Arthritis Foundation
  412-566-1645
  Web site: www.arthritis.org
- National Osteoporosis Foundation
  1-800-223-9994
  Web site: www.nof.org/

**If you are a male:**

A testicular self-exam can increase the chances of early detection of cancer and a possible cure.

- Examine each testicle once a month after a warm bath or shower. Notify your doctor if you feel any new growth or lump.

Discuss with your physician whether you should have a digital rectal exam and/or PSA (prostate specific antigen) blood test to check for prostate cancer.
Living a Healthy Lifestyle (continued)

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer. If found early and treated promptly, it is almost 100 percent curable.

To prevent skin cancer:

- Avoid exposure to midday sun.
- Wear protective clothing, such as sun hats and long sleeves.
- Use sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or greater.

Colorectal cancer is the second most common form of cancer for men and women. Screening for this type of cancer is recommended for both men and women over age 50. Your doctor may order an annual test for blood in your stool and/or a sigmoidoscopy (SIG-moy-DOS-ko-pee) or a colonoscopy. Both of these are exams of the colon, and are done by placing a thin scope into the rectum. If your doctor doesn’t suggest colon cancer screening, please ask if you should be tested.

For more information, contact:

- University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute
  1-800-237-4724
  Web site: www.upci.upmc.edu

- Cancer Information Service
  1-800-4-CANCER (422-6237)
  Web site: www.nci.nih.gov/

High blood pressure and high cholesterol put you at risk for heart disease and stroke. High blood pressure (hypertension) is the leading risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Early detection and treatment of high blood pressure can save your life, so have your blood pressure checked yearly, or more frequently if you are at risk.
High blood cholesterol is one of the biggest risk factors for heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. The good news is that you have some control over your cholesterol. Your doctor will decide how often you should be tested.

For more information contact the American Heart Association at 1-800-AHA-USA1 (242-8721) or visit their Web site at www.americanheart.org.

Many older adults have hearing and/or vision problems. Vision problems can be dangerous. Poor vision can increase your risk of falling and threaten your personal safety. If you feel that you cannot hear or see as well as you would like, please speak to your doctor. We recommend yearly vision and hearing screenings.

Adult Immunizations

Immunizations can protect you from certain diseases or make symptoms less severe. The tetanus immunization should be repeated every 10 years.

A pneumonia vaccine or a yearly flu vaccine may be recommended for most adults over 65. Your doctor will recommend the immunizations that are appropriate. If you think you are due for any immunizations, please bring it to your doctor’s attention.
For further information about UPMC Health System services, call 412-647-UPMC (8762) or, toll-free, 1-800-533-UPMC (8762) or visit our Web site at www.upmc.edu.
These recommendations will help you achieve a healthy lifestyle. Our goal is to help you look and feel better, be healthy, and live a long life.

It is important to follow your doctor’s recommendations for screening and testing. It is only by forming a partnership with your physician that your health can best be protected.