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Healthy Aging. VOL.2

As people age, the importance of taking care of their physical and mental health becomes increasingly apparent. Age-related changes and potential health challenges can be minimized through adopting healthy habits, adopting preventive measures, and regular medical check-ups. Aging will likely cause wrinkles and gray hair.

But do you know how aging will affect your teeth, heart, and sexuality? Find out what changes to expect as you continue aging and how to promote good health at any age.

Digestive System with Aging

Age-related structural changes in the large intestine can result in more constipation in older adults. Other contributing factors include a lack of exercise, not drinking enough fluids, and a low-fiber diet.

Medications, such as diuretics and iron supplements, and certain medical conditions, such as diabetes, also might contribute to constipation.

What you can do to prevent constipation:

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Make sure your diet includes high-fiber foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Limit high-fat meats, dairy products, and sweets, which might cause constipation. Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
- **Physical activity in your daily routine.** Regular physical activity can help prevent constipation.

- **Don't ignore the urge to have a bowel movement.** Holding in a bowel movement for too long can cause constipation.

Bladder and Urinary Tract with Aging

Our bladder may become less elastic as we age, resulting in the need to urinate more often. Weakening of bladder muscles and pelvic floor muscles may make it difficult for you to empty your bladder completely or cause you to lose bladder control (urinary incontinence). In men, an enlarged or inflamed prostate also can cause difficulty emptying the bladder and incontinence. Other factors that contribute to incontinence include being overweight, nerve damage from diabetes, certain medications, and caffeine or alcohol consumption.

To promote bladder and urinary tract health:

- **Go to the bathroom regularly.** Consider urinating on a regular schedule, such as every hour. Slowly, extend the amount of time between your toilet trips.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.** If you're overweight, lose excess pounds.
- **Don't smoke.** If you smoke or use other tobacco products, ask your doctor to help you quit.
- **Do Kegel exercises.** To exercise your pelvic floor muscles (Kegel exercises), squeeze the muscles you would use to stop passing gas. Try it for three seconds at a time, and then relax for a count of three. Work up to doing the exercise 10 to 15 times in a row, at least three times a day.
- **Avoid bladder irritants.** Caffeine, acidic foods, alcohol, and carbonated beverages can make incontinence worse.
- **Avoid constipation.** Eat more fiber and take other steps to avoid constipation, which can worsen incontinence.