



Health

A healthy body, mind and soul are vital to successful aging. Making deliberate and wise personal choices could go a long way toward helping to ensure that you will make the most of your senior years. Your health could affect other areas of your life such as living choices, finances, dating and driving.

State of Affairs: Research



Don't have your first conversation at a hospital.

Senior care professionals surveyed report that



of family conversations about aging are prompted by an event such as a health crisis or other emergency.



While nearly three-fourths of adult children (71%) surveyed acknowledge that having conversations about age-related topics is the responsible thing to do, 37% said their conversations were triggered by health crises.

Source:

Home Instead, Inc., franchisor of the Home Instead Senior Care® network, completed 400 telephone interviews with seniors age 65 and older and 400 interviews with adult children of parents age 65 and older in Canada, and 645 surveys with senior care professionals in North America.

For the full executive summaries, go to **4070Talk.com**.



ACT



ACT (*Assess, Consider, Talk*) to help determine how your future will look. Completing the following exercises could help prepare you for the kind of future you desire.

Assess

Assess your current health and think about the risks, based on your own health as well as your genetics that you could face as you age. Assess your mind and soul health as well.

Would you consider yourself to be physically healthy? What do you think you could improve upon? How healthy do you want to be in your retirement years?

Do you see your doctor regularly and do you have routine checks and preventative screenings? (Some important preventative tests include mammograms for women *(to help catch breast cancer at its earliest stage)*, PSA blood tests for a man *(to help detect prostate cancer)*, a colonoscopy *(to help check for colon cancer)*, and memory tests *(to assess mental acuity)*. Log the screenings you have scheduled or completed.

Assess the medications you are on and their side effects, if any. Make sure that you have a written log of current medications. (Go to SeniorEmergencyKit.com for a medication tracker.) Check with your doctor regularly to assess whether you need adjustments to your medication schedule. Write down your plan for staying on top of your medications.

Assess where you are in your spiritual life. What is important to you about your spirituality? How do you find meaning in your life? How important will spirituality be in the future?

Consider

Being proactive can go a long way toward helping to achieve total health. Consider how you can improve your habits today for a healthier tomorrow.

Describe your daily diet. Do you get the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables? (See the **Learn More** section for resources.)

Describe your social life. What activities do you participate in that bring meaning to your life and do you see continuing those as you age? What new things would you like to add?

How much do you exercise? Track the types of exercise you do regularly and think about the changes you could make to improve upon what you already do. If you don't exercise, plan small ways to move more.

What ways do you keep your brain nimble? *(Some examples are reading, doing crossword puzzles, playing cards and other mind games, or playing video games, which can improve visual and spatial orientation.)* Companionship and conversation also are great ways to keep the mind active. Think about how you could add more mind activities to your regimen.

How do you express your spirituality *(religious services, traditions, etc.)*? What are other ways that you would be interested in incorporating your spirituality to help improve your soul such as going on retreats, reading and walking.

Talk

It's easy to have lofty goals about making life changes. Oftentimes we need others to hold us accountable. If you are in failing health or becoming forgetful, but don't know what to do, see a doctor. It could be a medication issue or some other problem. If you have bad health news to break to a family member, get all the information you need upfront from doctors and others.

After assessing and considering, write down what you need to do to improve your health, including any doctor's recommendations. Then talk with an accountability partner to help ensure you are staying on track. Be sure someone knows about your health care issues including the medications you are on.

Refer to the following conversation tips and suggestions for help communicating your wishes.

Conversation Tips

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"I've just stopped at a great farmer's market. I'd love to drop some veggies off for you to snack on."

"I'm having some strange symptoms. Do you think it could be my pills? Can you help me figure out if it's that or something else?"

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"Wow, you really take a lot of pills, Mom. I'm impressed you can keep them all straight. How about trying this pill organizer to make it easier?"

"Do you know anything about that new water therapy program down the street? I've been having some trouble walking and I'm wondering if that might help."

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Talk

If you live alone:

Find a trusted relative or friend who could motivate you to stay on top of your health issues.

If religious preferences impact health decisions:

Talk with your spiritual advisor if religious differences are impacting attitudes about treatment options among family members. Remember, you won't likely get everyone to agree.

Consider

If you are part of a blended family:

Consider scheduling a family meeting or family conference call to talk about any health issues of concern with the family. Make sure you know what you want to achieve at the end of the meeting. Is it simply to inform, ask for help or reach a family consensus about an issue?

Assess

If you have dementia:

Reach out to the medical community to get the help you need and visit HelpforAlzheimersFamilies.ca for a variety of resources that could arm you with information. Ask a friend/family member if he or she could accompany you to doctors' appointments.

Learn More

The following tools and resources can help families developing an action plan:

For medication tracker
CaregiverStress.com

Alzheimer Society Canada, Fact Sheets
Alzheimer.ca

Free resources and help for Alzheimer's family caregivers
helpforalzheimersfamilies.ca

Canadian Physical Activity Guideline
csep.ca

Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care Guidelines
canadiantaskforce.ca

Canadian Food Guide
hc-sc.gc.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada Nutrition Best Practices Guide
cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca

Government of Canada's Food and Nutrition resource centre, including recipes, grocery shopping tips, and more
healthycanadians.gc.ca

Alzheimer's Society Canada: BrainBooster activities
alzheimer.ca

Free resources to help family caregivers cope with the stresses of caregiving
CaregiverStress.com

Senior Wellness Alliance of Canada
seniorwellnessalliance.org

Strength for the Moment -- personal and inspirational caregiver stories
StrengthfortheMoment.com