
Medical **Checkup** with Dr. Jennifer Daley

Three **Critical Categories of Self-Care** By Dr. Jennifer Daley

As you begin to think ahead about your next season, you have the perfect opportunity to assess your personal health and wellness and determine where changes would be helpful.

It's critical to make the space and bandwidth to create momentum, perhaps for the first time, to enable significant improvements! My recommendations for health and wellness best practices fall under three main categories: preventive medical care, physical management, and stress management.

1

Preventive Care

FIRST: find a good doctor, one who will stay with you over time - perhaps, even, outlive you! This may sound like an old-fashioned idea, but it's still a good one! I understand the convenience and appeal of dropping into urgent care centers or pharmacy clinics for one-off diagnoses and treatments like a urinary tract infection or a strain or sprain. But forming a relationship with a doctor who knows your family history and your particular risk factors is invaluable. Further, keeping your medical records in one place with one doctor means that if you ever become seriously ill, you have a doctor who already knows you and your history. Plus, if you don't have an established relationship with a primary care physician, it can be very difficult to get in to see one when you are really sick. Going to an emergency room if you're feeling really sick isn't a good substitute for seeing your own doctor.

SECOND: know what you should be checked for. While you may have been able to get by in your 20s and 30s with having physicals every 2-3 years, now is the time to meet with your doctor each and every year. It helps create a health baseline and strengthens the patient-physician relationship, which is important to maximize your wellness. If your doctor knows you when you're well, he/she is able to provide the best care when you're sick - and may be able to help prevent some illness altogether.

Preventive tests are essential at this age and include: blood pressure, cholesterol, weight, blood sugar, bone density tests, annual flu vaccines, and colonoscopies. Women need regular gynecological exams, while men need to be screened routinely for prostate cancer - one of the most common, yet treatable, cancers. Early detection is crucial.

Below is a link to the US Preventive Medicine Task Force recommendations for the preventive screening by age group and what you need to have on a regular basis and with what frequency:

<https://healthfinder.gov/myhealthfinder/Result.aspx?age=61&gender=female&pregnant=false>

2

Physical Management

Keeping your weight in a normal range will help prevent a host of diseases: diabetes, some forms of cancer, and heart disease, just to name a few. Everyone's healthy weight range looks different. Calculating your body mass index (BMI) can be a helpful place to start. Have your weight and height measured, and then visit the following website for a BMI calculator:

https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm

The standard weight status categories associated with BMI ranges for adults are shown in the following table:

BMI	WEIGHT STATUS
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5–24.9	Normal or Healthy Weight
25.0–29.9	Overweight
30.0 and Above	Obese

Regular exercise is a second pillar of managing your physical health, and the three categories you should try to hit are aerobic conditioning, strength training, and flexibility. Incidentally, exercise will not only help maintain your physical health, but it can also alleviate anxiety and depression.

THIRD: Be sure to protect your sleep. Research shows that one of the biggest sleep wreckers is looking at blue light (the kind of light that is emitted by computers and hand-held devices) right before bed, so be sure to give your brain 30 minutes to an hour of screenless transition time before trying to go to sleep at night.

3

Stress Management

Managing your stress throughout life requires a good deal of self-awareness. You will need to make an honest assessment about what makes you stressed, and what makes the stress worse vs. better. For some, exercise is a great stress buster. For others, getting better sleep (both quantity and quality) is the most important element of stress management. Know what works for you—and what doesn't.

If you find that your stress is at an uncontrollable level—meaning, you are taking steps to manage it and nothing seems to help—you should see someone for counseling to figure out what's really driving it. Over time, high stress levels can chip away at your physical and emotional health, so it's best to get a handle on it early.

Intuitively knowing methods to reduce stress is common; putting them into action during a storm or period of flux is more challenging. Instead of reaching for that glass of wine, cookie, or iPad, try these solid, time-tested techniques to restore a sense of calm and presence. The ultimate goal: increasing the enjoyment of your life!

- Get outside and into nature
- Play music
- Exercise
- Eat healthy, nutritious foods
- Relax into healthy sleep patterns
- Read or write poetry
- Spend time with animals – maybe it's the right time for a pet
- Connect with friends and family – nurture your relationships
- Laugh
- Light a scented candle
- Take up a gentle yoga practice
- Meditate
- Join groups through church, volunteering, hobbies, and sports

Whatever you choose to do next, health and wellness will be your biggest and most essential asset! ■



Loneliness: Are You Feeling Disconnected?

A ccording to a 2018 AARP Foundation study of over 3,000 adults, one in three Americans age 45 and over are lonely - which may harm their quality of life and pose health risks equivalent to those of obesity or smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day.

Fighting loneliness is a matter of connection. One way to have a meaningful connection with another person: put down your device. Many studies suggest that being on phones and social media for extended periods of time makes people feel worse, not better.

Second, figure out what gives you meaning in your life. During the first half of your life, work may have provided you with a sense of identity and purpose. This transition, however, offers an opportunity to reset and make new connections with people who love what you love and to form new friendships. It could be a faith community, or it could be around an interest you have—a sport, music, or your love of dogs—but whatever it may be, find a group of people who share your interests and connect with them. There are many websites and apps that can help you find groups of people in your area with common interests.

We're all going to feel lonely at times; we can't escape it 100%. But when you have a community of people you can count on, you can call someone the next time you feel lonely and say, "Let's go to dinner, or meet at the gym." In summary: think about what matters to you, and then find a group of people who share that.

One final note about devices: our phones can be wonderful tools, but they can also have a big downside, especially on the loneliness front. This doesn't mean you have to stop using your phone, but do consider taking some time every day to turn it off, or at least put it in another room. At first, you could feel anxious about missing something. Once you get used to having that daily break, however, you might actually look forward to having some breath and some space for your mind to think about other things, or to meet a friend for coffee. ■



RECOMMENDED READING:

<https://www.aarp.org/home-family/friends-family/info-2018/loneliness-survey.html>



While loneliness is not a diagnosable medical condition, research has shown that it has the same impact on death rates as smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

—2018 Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index




Early Signs of Depression

Catching depression early can give you the opportunity to address it and get the help you need. The following symptoms could be early warning signals of depression:

- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Anxiety that can't be managed/controlled
- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts
- Frequent feelings of restlessness and/or irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and pain for which no other cause can be diagnosed

If you have been experiencing one or more of the symptoms above, consider seeking support from a mental health professional.

Jennifer Daley, MD, FACP, is a renowned scholar, author, and former Executive Vice President, COO, and Senior Strategy Consultant for UMass Memorial Medical Center. She has held professorships at Harvard, UMass, Dartmouth, and Tufts. As Medical Concierge for My Next Season, Dr. Daley empowers clients to evaluate their personal health, set wellness goals, and manage stress during times of transition.



So far, we've taken a wide-angle view of your overall wellness. Is there anything from this discussion that resonated with you? Are there any health and wellness goals that immediately come to mind?

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