

Don't Get Weaker as You Get Older

The risk of disability increases with age. Inactivity, poor diet and smoking, among other unhealthy habits are associated with a wide range of chronic diseases, some of which can even lead to premature death.

New studies reveal that this kind of lifestyle affects everyone, especially older adults. Older adults often fear the loss of independence and disabilities and yet they sometimes submit themselves to unhealthy behaviors.

In a recent study found in the British Medical Journal, researchers in France reported that people who ate fruits and vegetables less than once a week, were physically inactive and who smoked or had quit smoking within the last 15 years, were more than twice as likely to develop a disability than their peers who did not participate in these lifestyles.

A disability is defined as “difficulty or dependency in carrying out activities essential to independent living, including essential roles, tasks needed for self-care and independent living in a home and desired activities important to one’s quality of life.

There are current populations who are aging into the golden years with these disabilities that are preventable. You can avoid or delay these disabilities as you age.

The first step is to get moving. In the research, it was shown that one predictor of developing a disability was the fact that the person had a low or intermediate level of physical activity.

Low activity was defined as walking less than one hour a day and exercising less than once per week. High activity was considered the opposite. It was walking more than one hour a day and exercising more than once a week. Anything in between is considered intermediate.

The next step to preventing a disability as you age is to stop smoking. This study showed that those who smoke or have quite within 15 years have a 26 percent higher risk of developing a disability than those who did not smoke.

Poor nutrition was close to smoking as far as developing a disability. In the study, this was determined by how many times a person ate raw and/or cooked fruits or vegetables. The results showed that adults who ate fewer fruits and vegetables, such as less than once a day, increased their risk of developing a disability by 24 percent.

Eating fruits and vegetables, while healthy, is only a part of a healthy diet. Stick to whole and minimally processed foods, such as foods that are located in the area of produce, dairy and fresh meats, rather than on foods that are more processed and have added fruits and sodium.

While things such as chronic conditions, trauma, body mass index and other health issues are factors, the study showed that more than two-thirds of the additional disability risks were directly linked to unhealthy lifestyles.

So get out and move at least once a week or more. Take a walk and get other exercise as well. Remember to eat your vegetables and add fresh fruits to your diet. Help yourself become more active, eat healthy and perhaps you will lower your risk of having a disability.

Source: Utah Extension and The British Medical Journal.