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# HEALTH & LONGEVITY



## What to know about seniors and vaccines

The effectiveness of vaccines in relation to protecting young children is well documented, but what about seniors and vaccines? Are immunizations still a vital part of a wellness routine when adults reach their golden years? The National Institute on Aging advises older adults to speak with their doctors or pharmacists about the vaccines they need, which may help to prevent or reduce the severity of various diseases.




### COVID-19

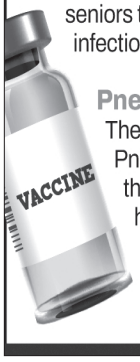
The NIA notes that age is a risk factor for serious illness from COVID-19. Due to the relative infancy of COVID-19, researchers are still learning about the effectiveness of vaccines against new variants of the virus. But older adults are more likely to get seriously ill from COVID-19 than younger people, so it's imperative seniors discuss immunization against the virus with their physicians.

### Influenza

The World Health Organization notes that the flu kills as many as 650,000 people across the globe each year. A 2009 study published in the journal Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses indicated that most deaths associated with influenza in industrialized countries occur among seniors age 65 and older. The flu is easily transmitted from one person to another and the NIA advises everyone age six months and older to get an annual flu vaccine. While the protection from a flu vaccine can lessen over time, particularly in older adults, a flu shot still reduces the likelihood of serious illness and/or hospitalization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that seniors age 65 and older receive a higher-dose flu vaccine or an adjuvanted flu vaccine, the latter of which helps to create a stronger immune response than a normal flu shot. Seniors are urged to speak with their physicians about which flu shot is right for them.

### Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

The NIA indicates that RSV is a common virus that often produces mild, cold-like symptoms. But older adults should know that they are at higher risk of developing severe symptoms if they are infected with RSV. The NIA notes RSV can be particularly dangerous for older adults with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems. Hospitalization or even death can occur after severe RSV symptoms develop. RSV vaccines can prevent serious health problems, and the CDC urges seniors to speak with their physicians regarding immunization. Doing so prior to peak RSV infection season, which is fall and winter, is ideal.




### Pneumococcal disease

The CDC advises that all adults age 50 and older get pneumococcal vaccination. Pneumococcal disease is a serious infection that the NIA notes often causes pneumonia in the lungs. The risk of getting very sick and even dying from pneumococcal disease is higher among older adults than younger people.

There are different forms of the pneumococcal vaccine, and seniors can speak to their physicians about which one is best for them.



## How seniors can remain physically and mentally active

Nearly 45 percent of people age 65 and older show measurable improvements in brain health, physical function or both over time when they take certain steps to promote physical and mental wellness, according to a report in the journal Geriatrics. Here are some guidelines to help seniors stay sharp and in shape!

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, supplemented by at least two days of muscle-strengthening exercises. Brisk walking or swimming can improve cardiovascular health and reduce the risk of stroke and hypertension, says the Massachusetts Council on Aging. Incorporating yoga or Tai Chi is vital for fall prevention, as it targets balance and flexibility. The CDC says improving joint mobility and balance can significantly extend the amount of time seniors can live independently. In addition, lifting light weights or using resistance bands helps combat age-related muscle loss, which is essential for maintaining metabolic health.

### COGNITIVE ADVANTAGES

Mental fitness is just as vital to seniors as physical fitness. According to the World Health Organization, routine cognitive stimulation enhances "brain capital," delaying the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's. Strategies for effective mental engagement include:

**Learning:** Lifelong learning techniques include picking up a new language or learning an instrument. This helps strengthen neural pathways that allows the brain to reorganize itself even in later decades.

**Play games:** Play isn't just for kids; games like chess or complex puzzles improve problem-solving and memory retention, according to Nixon Adult Daycare in Houston.

**Socialize:** Isolation is a leading risk factor for cognitive decline, says the National Institutes of Health. Group activities like book clubs or community volunteering can offer emotional fulfillment and mental stimulation.

### POWER OF POSSIBILITY

Findings from a recent Yale University study indicated seniors with a positive outlook on aging were significantly more likely to show physical and mental improvements compared to those with negative perspectives. Psychological resilience is an important tool for seniors to stay healthy.

Movement, social interaction, stimulating activities, and a positive attitude can help seniors maintain overall health.