Are You Asking The Right Questions?
Questions to ask when your doctor prescribes a new medicine

Neutralizing Nature
Emergency preparedness tips for seniors

Triumph Over Travel Concerns
How to travel even if you have limited mobility
I’m living life again. I’m happier here than I’ve been in 10 years!

Donna, Willow Brook at Delaware Run

Donna Held and her daughter Kathryn are excited about the assisted living program at Willow Brook at Delaware Run.

A retired teacher, Donna moved in with her daughter after a fall, but her health declined. After visiting many assisted living centers, the two found everything Donna wanted at Willow Brook at Delaware Run.

“I’m living life again,” says Donna. “It’s a warm, cozy feeling. I’m happier here than I’ve been in 10 years.”

Ranked #1 in Delaware County in Resident Satisfaction*

*Resident Satisfaction Surveys, Ohio Department of Aging
Did you know that the key to personal health may begin in the core of the body? Doctors and researchers are learning more and more about how the immune system and other functions of the body are tied to microscopic players housed in the stomach and intestines. Improving this digestive environment can benefit the body in various ways.

Understanding probiotics
Bodily bacteria outnumber body cells by 10 to one, offers the health and wellness resource Healthline. Most of the bacteria in the body are harmless, and many of them in the gut actually are linked to numerous health benefits, such as weight loss, enhanced immune function, reduced risk of disease, and improved digestion. Unfortunately, bad bacteria also vie for space in the gut. If the good bacteria and yeasts, or probiotics, are not in abundance to push out the bad bacteria, like salmonella and E. coli, those bad bugs can proliferate, causing problems. It is essential to keep an abundance of probiotics available to stay healthy and maintain the “good vs. bad” balance in the gut.

Getting probiotics
While the body can be healthy without the addition of probiotics, having more can be beneficial. The Cleveland Clinic says that food and supplements containing probiotics assist the good bacteria already present in your gut. When a course of antibiotics wipes out both good and bad bacteria, for example, probiotic-rich foods and supplements can more readily replace what’s lost.

Dietary sources of probiotics include some yogurts, cheeses, kefir, sauerkraut, miso, kimchi, pickles, and beverages like kombucha, a fermented tea. Getting probiotics from foods is the most natural way to supplement good gut bacteria, as the foods meld with the probiotics in ways that doctors may never understand to deliver the most benefits.

The downside is it’s impossible to measure just how many probiotics can be acquired from foods. That is what makes supplementation so handy. Capsules and tablets are loaded with a variety of different active bacteria and yeast cultures to aid the digestive system in measurable ratios. Some tout anywhere from one to 30 billion active colony-forming units (CFUs) per serving.

Side effects
Probiotics are generally healthy for people to consume in amounts found in foods, advises the Mayo Clinic. Most healthy adults can safely add foods or dietary supplements that contain probiotics to their diets. Introducing probiotics may cause temporary and mild flatulence, discomfort and bloating.

Probiotics can be yet another tool to improve overall health at any age, but especially for adults looking to minimize illness risk.

Feel your best, starting with your stomach

Yogurt is a dietary source of probiotics, healthy bacteria and yeasts that may improve overall health.
Many adults lament that even if they were solid sleepers in their younger years, by the age of 50, their quality of sleep has unraveled. Some cling to the wisdom that people simply do not need as much sleep as they get older. Even though that is partly true, sufficient sleep is still a vital component of a healthy life.

The National Sleep Foundation recently updated its sleep recommendations per age group to include categories “may be appropriate” and “not recommended.” This includes a range of hours that may be adequate for certain adults. Adults between the ages of 26 and 65 are advised to get seven to nine hours of sleep per evening. However, six hours or 10 hours also may be acceptable. People over the age of 65 need roughly seven to eight hours of sleep each night, though between five and six hours also may be fine. Generally speaking, anything under five hours is not recommended based on data reviewed by sleep experts.

Many older adults do not get enough sleep due to insomnia, states Jack Gardner, MD, a neurologist certified in sleep medicine. They’re concerned about health issues, may have sleep apnea, can experience pain or frequent urination, or may be taking medication that impedes sleep. Dr. Leila Kheirandish-Gozal, director of clinical sleep research at the University of Chicago, says that, over time, insufficient sleep can impact metabolism, mood, memory, and heart function.

Various strategies can help people get more sleep and enjoy better sleep quality.

Create a luxury bed environment. Splurge on the largest mattress you can afford and one that is comfortable for both parties (if married/coupled). A roomy bed routinely invites sleep. If you have a restless partner, try two separate beds pushed against each other.

Consider white noise. The sounds of the house or outdoors may be keeping you up. Many people find that the gentle hum of a fan or a white-noise machine with a calming sound effect makes it easier for them to dose off than complete quiet. It can also block out extraneous noises.

Keep electronics out of the bedroom. It can be challenging to disconnect from electronics, but it is essential to falling asleep. Even a back-lit text coming through in the wee hours can be enough illumination to disrupt sleep.

See your doctor. If medications or illnesses are keeping you up, a change in regimen may provide the relief you need. Older adults can learn the steps to sleeping more soundly and easily.

Did you know?

Those poised to begin a health regimen that includes probiotics would be wise to also educate themselves about the closely named, yet vastly different, “prebiotics” that are also beneficial to health. Prebiotics are to probiotics what fertilizer is to a vegetable garden. Prebiotics are essentially a special type of soluble fiber that is used by the beneficial bacteria as fuel, advises the prebiotic supplement company Prebiotin. Examples of good sources of prebiotics include bananas, onions, garlic, Jerusalem artichokes, apple skins, beans, and chicory root. The prebiotic fiber moves through the small intestine undigested and fermented until it reaches the large intestine. Once there, beneficial bacteria break it down and use it as food. Thusly, the prebiotics can then multiply readily and improve the balance of good and bad bacteria in the gut. Eating prebiotic foods can fuel the process, but many probiotic supplements now have a combination formula that includes prebiotics in the recipe.

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Many positive changes come with aging. Financial independence, freedom to pursue hobbies and more time to spend with loved ones are some such benefits.

But as men and women age, they also must give consideration to those changes few consider until they’re happening. Retirement, loss of a spouse, distance from family, downsizing, and fears of illness must be given their due attention so aging adults can get the assistance they need when they need it. Geriatric psychiatrists can fill the gaps where others cannot.

The American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry defines the profession as a Doctor of Medicine or Doctor of Osteopathy with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders that may occur in older adults. These disorders may include, but are not limited to, dementia, depression, anxiety, late life addiction disorders, and schizophrenia. Although geriatric psychiatrists can treat these and more, they also may help adults navigate emotional, physical and social needs that come with getting older.

The AAGP estimates that the rate of mental illness among older adults will double over the next 10 years from what it was in 2000. Many of the people treated will need assistance with symptoms of dementia. The organization Alzheimer’s Disease International indicates there are more than 9.9 million new cases of dementia each year worldwide.

Geriatric psychiatrists can provide specialized care to this unique demographic. Geriatric psychiatrists often focus on prevention, evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of mental and emotional disorders in the elderly, says the American Psychiatric Association, an advocate for improvement of psychiatric care for elderly patients. Geriatric psychiatrists understand how medication dosage and therapy treatments may need to be customized as one ages. These psychiatrists also can consult with experts in neurology and primary care physicians when there are symptoms across various fields, which may be the case when patients are experiencing memory impairment, anxiety and depression.

Geriatric psychiatrists suggest speaking with mental health professionals early on if symptoms of low mood, restlessness, insomnia, and other hallmarks of potential mental dysfunction are present in elderly patients. This way doctors can step in early and improve their quality of life.
How to travel even if you have limited mobility

Many people dream of traveling the world in retirement. Such dreams come true every day. But many more retirees or people nearing retirement fear that their dreams of seeing the world won’t be possible due to mobility issues beyond their control. Thankfully, such fears are largely unwarranted.

Various conditions can affect men and women’s mobility. Many such issues tend to arise after age 50, prompting many people to believe their post-retirement travel plans will never come to fruition. Conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD; and heart disease may make it hard for people to travel. But that difficulty doesn’t mean aging men and women should resign themselves to a sedentary lifestyle. Though they might require a little extra effort before embarking on their trips, the following are a handful of ways that aging men and women with limited mobility can reap the rewards of traveling.

Contact airlines or other transportation companies if you require special accommodations. The U.S. Department of Transportation notes that passengers are generally not required to provide advanced notice for disability-related accommodations. However, it makes sense to provide such notice anyway. By doing so, men and women with limited mobility can ensure they will have adequate assistance during their trips. When made aware of passengers’ mobility issues, airlines or other travel companies may arrange for wheelchairs to be available at the gates or train platforms so passengers can easily make connecting flights and trains. In addition, advance notice gives companies a chance to provide seating accommodations that can make for a more enjoyable trip.

Contact hotels directly. Each country has its own laws regarding how to accommodate people with physical disabilities or mobility issues, so don’t leave things to chance. Before booking a hotel room abroad, travelers with limited mobility should contact the hotel directly to confirm that it can accommodate their needs.

Men and women with limited mobility can still enjoy the wonders of travel, even if it requires some extra effort before embarking on their trips.
For seniors, being alone can escalate feelings of isolation. As men and women age, their social circles may begin to shrink. The health resource Aging Care says 43 percent of seniors have a persistent sense of loneliness. For many, dating is helping them find renewed companionship, self-confidence and vigor. Despite the rush that one may feel when beginning a new relationship, it is important to put safety first. One of the key considerations is disease prevention. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that, between 2000 and 2008, there was a 45 percent increase in reported sexually transmitted diseases in Americans over the age of 40. Online dating may make seniors vulnerable to STDs. Furthermore, many STDs go unrecognized and thusly untreated in the senior community because they’re simply not expected. Education can help keep seniors safe. Doctors can inquire about sexual activity as they would with other age groups. Seniors themselves should always practice protected intimacy and get refresher courses on “safe sex” education.

The health resource Aging Care says

43% of seniors have a persistent sense of loneliness
Though few people may want to take medicine each day, prescription drugs prolong lives and help people manage conditions that might otherwise make it difficult to live life to the fullest.

A 2017 survey from Consumer Reports found that 55 percent of people living in the United States take a prescription medicine. The survey also found that those who take prescription drugs use an average of four such medications. That figure might alarm some people, especially aging men and women whose bodies might be more susceptible to conditions that are often treated with medication.

There’s no denying that prescription drugs can save lives. But men and women have a right to explore their options when doctors prescribe them medications, and asking the right questions when doctors suggest medication can help men and women decide if prescription medicine is their best option.

To help men and women make the best decisions regarding their healthcare, the National Institute on Aging advises people to ask their physicians these questions when being prescribed a new medicine.

- What is the name of the medicine, and why am I taking it?
- Which medical condition does this medicine treat?
- How many times a day should I take the medicine, and at what times should I take it?
- If the prescription instructions say the medicine must be taken “four times a day,” does that mean four times in 24 hours or four times during the daytime?
- How much medicine should I take?
- Should I take the medicine on its own or with food?
- Should I avoid certain foods and beverages when taking this medicine?
- How long will it take this medicine to work?
- Will this medicine cause problems if I am taking other medicines?
- Can I safely operate a motor vehicle while taking this medication?
- What does "as needed" mean?
- When should I stop taking the medicine?
- What should I do if I forget to take my medicine?
- Can I expect any side effects? What should I do if I have a problem?
- Will I need a refill, and how do I arrange that?

When discussing medications with a physician, it’s imperative that men and women be forthcoming about any other medicines they might be taking under the guidance of other doctors. In addition, men and women should tell their physicians about any over-the-counter medicines or vitamins and supplements they are taking. Sharing such information can prevent potentially serious complications from arising.

Medicine saves lives every day. Smart patients can help medicine do its job by learning about their medications and discussing them openly and honestly with their physicians.
Natural disasters can strike at any time, and when they do, the damage is often considerable. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, between 2005 and 2014 natural disasters caused $1.4 trillion in damage across the globe, affecting 1.7 billion people along the way.

Various preventive measures can protect people and their homes from the potentially devastating impact of natural disasters. For example, oceanfront communities may be able to decrease property damage by exacting certain measures, such as building homes on stilts.

Another way to prevent tragedy related to natural disasters is to develop an emergency preparedness plan before the next storm strikes. That’s important for everyone, but especially so for seniors, many of whom live with mobility issues that can compromise their ability to escape the eye of oncoming storms.

In recognition of the potential problems seniors face when natural disasters strike, the American Red Cross offers the following tips to seniors and their families so aging men and women can make it through such situations safe and sound.

Make arrangements to contact loved ones. Prior to an emergency, seniors and their support network should make arrangements to make immediate contact once a disaster strikes. Determine who will make initial contact and how that contact will be made (i.e., via phone, text message, social media, etc.), as well as who will be responsible for providing assistance if necessary. Such a plan lets everyone within the support network know their precise responsibilities, which limits confusion in the sometimes hectic hours and days after disaster strikes.

Exchange keys. Make sure everyone in the support network has keys to seniors’ homes. In so doing, support networks are increasing the chances that someone will be able to reach potentially vulnerable seniors if the primary contacts are incapable of doing so.

Let others know where emergency supplies are kept. Everyone should have emergency supplies in their homes. Seniors should not take it for granted that such supplies can be easily found if they become incapacitated during a storm. Make sure such information can be easily accessed during a storm by emailing it to your support network and/or posting the information in a convenient location in your home, such as on the refrigerator.

Share your evacuation plans. In the wake of recent disasters, many communities that did not previously feel vulnerable to natural disasters have devised evacuation plans for residents. Seniors should share these plans with their support networks. Doing so makes it easier for relatives to find you if you must evacuate your home before help arrives.

Share important medical information. Seniors should share medical information, such as healthcare providers and a list of the medications they’re taking. This can make things easier for emergency responders to successfully treat people who become incapacitated during storms.

Wrinkles and a little extra weight around the middle certainly garner attention, but hair loss is another age-related concern. As people age, their hair changes in several ways. Graying through loss of melanin pigment is the most apparent. MedlinePlus, the health information resource from the U.S. National Library of Medicine, says that strands of hair also can become less dense and smaller through the years. Many follicles also may stop producing new hairs. Regardless of age, it is customary for a person to lose about 100 hairs a day. If those hairs are not replaced as readily as they once were, patches of thinning and balding hair may appear.

The rate at which hair falls out is largely determined by genetics, according to Headcovers Unlimited, a company that produces wigs, scarves and other headwraps. But nearly everyone will experience some sort of age-related hair loss. Hormonal changes during menopause can cause noticeable thinning and scalp exposure that may be mistaken for actual hair loss.

There are many ways to mitigate hair loss. Here are some handy tips.

**Try a new cut.** Work with your stylist to determine a haircut that can suggest the appearance of thickness and camouflage the loss of density or bare spots. Graduated layers kept close to the face can help, as can pixie cuts. Men can choose to go entirely bald and bold.

**Treat hair gently.** Avoid harsh chemical processes and constant heat styling. Protect fragile hair from damage by pampering it.

**Look for thickening formulas.** Many shampoos, serums and conditioners tout volumizing or thickening properties. These can help plump up hair and make thinning less apparent.

**Talk to your doctor.** Hair loss may be a result of medication, a skin condition or aging. Doctors may suggest products, such as Minoxidil and Lipogaine formulas, that can be used on the scalp to reduce hair loss and help follicles produce new hair strands.

Hair thinning and hair loss can be a symptom of getting older. Knowledge is key to improve hair’s appearance at any age.
In an ideal world, people young and old exercise each day. But as men and women age, finding time to work out is not so easy. Commitments to work and family often take precedence over daily exercise. As a result, many people 50 and over might not have exercised regularly or at all in many years. But as children grow up or even move out, people facing down their golden years are often compelled to get back in the gym. That’s a wise decision that can increase a person’s chances of being healthy and happy in retirement.

But before beginning a new exercise regimen, men and women over 50 should take heed of the following safety tips to ensure their efforts are not derailed by accident or injury.

**Speak with your physician.** The National Institute on Aging notes that even people with chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or arthritis can be physically active. However, anyone with such a condition and even those who don’t fall into those categories should consult with their physicians and receive a full physical before exercising. Such a consultation and checkup can shed light on any unknown issues, and physicians can offer advice on how to safely manage any problems that may arise.

**Begin with low-intensity exercises.** Even if you feel great and have maintained a healthy weight, don’t push yourself too hard at the start. Your body needs time to adjust to physical activity, so choose low-intensity exercises like walking and light strength training so your muscles, tendons and ligaments can adjust. Initially, exercise every other day so your body has ample time to recover between workouts.

**Choose the right places to exercise outdoors.** Exercising outside provides the best of both worlds for many people, providing a chance to get healthy all while enjoying the great outdoors. When exercising outdoors, choose areas that are not remote and where others can see you and offer help if you suffer an injury or have an accident. Boardwalks, public parks and outdoor gyms are safer places to work out than wooded areas or other places well off the beaten path.

**Stay hydrated.** The NIA notes that many people lose their sense of thirst as they age. But just because you aren’t thirsty does not mean you don’t need water, especially while exercising. Water regulates body temperature and lubricates the joints, thereby decreasing your risk of injury during exercise.

Exercising after 50 can help people live healthy well into retirement. But caution must be exercised when aging men and women return to exercise after a long break.