

# TOP 10 WAYS TO IMPROVE THE OVERALL HEALTH OF SENIOR CITIZENS



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beth Wallace is a Safety Specialist for Canadian Safe Step Walk-In Tubs Inc. She visits seniors at their homes and shows them how they can make their homes safer. Her goal is to make sure they have a better quality of life and to see that their wishes to stay in the home they love for the rest of their lives are granted.

## ABOUT CANADIAN SAFE STEP WALK-IN TUBS INC.

Canadian Safe-Step Walk-In Tub Inc. is committed to empowering North America's senior citizens, as well as those individually suffering from the effects of disability and mobility impairment. For those who seek a therapeutic and high quality bathing experience, we offer domestically produced walk-in bathtubs and walk-in showers tailored to their specific needs.

# INTRODUCTION

Aging is a natural part of living. By this stage in your life, you've definitely LIVED! Whether you married or remained single, settled in one place and had children or chosen to travel the world, worked a dozen different jobs or retired from working 35 years in a single occupation, you've probably lived a very full life. Now you've reached your "Golden Years" and life has slowed down and changed dramatically.

Fortunately for you, getting older doesn't mean that your days of life and vitality are gone for good. Even as you age, you can continue to add life to your years by improving your overall health. Taking time to care for your physical, mental, social, and emotional health is the key to healthy aging in the later years of life.

Taking care of the life you have is easier than you may think. Grab hold of a new rein on life in your senior years by embracing some or all of these next 10 tips for improving your health as a senior citizen.



# 1 TAKE YOUR PREVENTATIVE HEALTH CARE SERIOUSLY

As you age, it may be even more important than ever before to take your preventative health care seriously. As a young adult, your only trips to the physician may have been for severe illnesses or injuries. But, as you age, your body can't afford to wait until it's too late to receive proper medical care. The best thing you can do for your body is to prevent medical problems before they start, or at the very least, catch them early on so your body has time to recover properly.

## TRUST THE EXPERTS. HERE'S WHY...

### YOUR PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN

- + Your primary doctor should know more about your health care needs than you do!
- + Regular visits will allow your physician to monitor any prescription dosages you require to ensure that you are always getting the correct amounts to meet your needs.
- + Could lifestyle changes help you eliminate one or more medications you're on? Your doctor will tell you.
- + Do you have any medical changes (good or bad) that should be considered? Your doctor is the expert in this area. Trust him/her!



## YOUR OPHTHALMOLOGIST/OPTOMETRIST

- + As you age, your eyesight may be changing. Don't rely on your eyeglasses prescription from five years ago to get you safely through the day.
- + Making sure your lenses have the correct prescription strength, and that your frames fit properly, is an easy way to ensure that you're seeing as clearly as possible. Doing so may help you maintain your driver's license as long as possible. Clearly seeing where you're going is the first step in getting there safely.

**DON'T FORGET  
TO SCHEDULE  
YOUR ANNUAL  
VISION SCREENING**

## YOUR DENTIST

Gum disease and tooth decay are no laughing matter. Taking care of your smile can improve your self-confidence and prevent a host of other medical problems like infections, headaches, and constant pain that could impact your living and eating habits.

- + Visit your dentist every six months for routine cleanings
- + Regularly have dentures checked to maintain a proper fit in your mouth

## 2 KEEP UP THE PACE WITH AN ACTIVE LIFESTYLE

Don't let your age keep you from living the active lifestyle you want. Your day-to-day living may look different as you get older, but staying active is more important now than ever before.

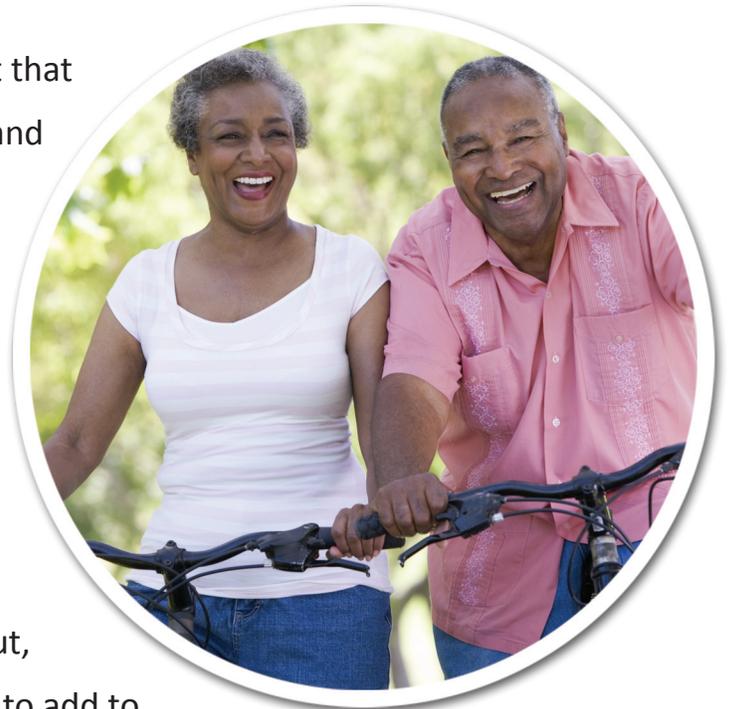
### REGULAR EXERCISE IS THE KEY TO HEALTHY AGING

Regular exercise is one important ingredient that can help boost your energy levels, manage and control many symptoms of illness or pain, and control any weight gain you might experience otherwise.

You don't need to join expensive gyms or challenge yourself to run a marathon. Start slow and simply make a goal to add more movement to your current lifestyle. But, no matter what form of exercise you decide to add to your routine,

be sure to consult with your physician first to make sure your body can handle it.

*NOTE \* There are many easy exercises that you can do from right from your chair. If you have a disability or other physical limitations that keep you from getting outdoors, you can still stay active inside your own home.*



## FILL YOUR DAY WITH ACTIVITIES

There are so many ways to stay busy each day. Creating a routine and a daily plan can keep you focused and moving throughout the day. Join a club. Do your own grocery shopping rather than pay for a service. Perform simple yard work or household chores rather than hire a professional. If you are able to do these things, then do them. Staying active will not only keep you physically strong, but mentally strong as well.



## 3 EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN DAILY

Don't forget that your brain is the hub from where all of your bodily movements originate. Staying mentally healthy (aka "psychological well-being") is just as important as remaining physically healthy. Take time every day to exercise your mind and to stay alert and in tune with the world around you.

### FIVE STEPS TO STAY MENTALLY FIT

- 1 Get plenty of sleep and exercise. Sleep deprivation is bad for your brain and will inhibit brain function.
- 2 Listen to music. Music has been shown to influence mood, relieve stress, help with relaxation, improve focus, and foster creativity. It can even serve as a motivator during other positive lifestyle habits like exercise.
- 3 Do mental puzzles or games. Completing crossword puzzles or word searches, assembling jigsaw puzzles, and playing games with people is a great way to keep your mind sharp and help you maintain focus and concentration.
- 4 Don't stop learning. Take time to read books, watch the news, or stay up on current events happening in the world around you. Take a class that you've always wanted to take or start an interesting hobby.



- 5 Find time to laugh. Laughter really is the best medicine. It engages many parts of the brain and has been shown to stimulate learning and creativity. Plus, a little laughter can help you see the lighter side to life and reduce your stress levels as well.



## 4 GIVING BACK CAN GIVE YOU NEW LIFE

Volunteering is a great way to engage with others within your community and find a new purpose and responsibility in your later years. If you volunteer just a few hours a week, it could not only change the life of another individual, but yours as well.

Volunteer opportunities really are just a phone call away and are waiting for you to come join in the experience.

Volunteering is a great way to expand your social circle and meet other individuals from different walks of life that share in a common interest with you. Whether you are self-conscious and have a difficult time meeting people, or you like to be the life of a party, these groups need you.

### NEED IDEAS FOR VOLUNTEER LOCATIONS?

If you don't know where to start looking for a place to volunteer, or even what voluntary jobs you might enjoy doing, check out this list to see what might appeal to you.

- + Food Banks/Soup Kitchens (serve food, stock and inventory donations, clean up)
- + Schools (teach a child to read)
- + Community Centres
- + Habitat For Humanity (help build a house for a family in need)



- + Local parks (plant a garden, pick up litter, mow the grass)
- + Hospitals (serve food in the cafeteria, visit patients)
- + Youth Programs (Big Brothers/Big Sisters, mentoring a child or teen, teaching a class)
- + Local non-profit groups

This is not a complete list, but it should help set you on the path toward giving back to, and improving, your community. When you use your free time to share your skills, gifts, and talents with others, everybody wins!



## 5 ADAPT YOUR HOME FOR YOUR CHANGING NEEDS

Certain limitations may naturally arise as you head into the aging process. Changing health needs and mobility concerns may keep you from fully enjoying the home you live in and the way you spend your senior years. If you're like most seniors, your goal is to remain in your home for as long as possible so you can remain as independent as you feel. Let's face it. If you can wake up every morning feeling alive and excited about the day ahead of you, you're going to feel so much better physically, too. Living in a house that is YOUR HOME is one important factor in making that happen. So, as your physical needs change, it makes sense that your home should change along with them.

### EASY FIXES TO MAKE YOUR HOME SAFER AND MORE ENJOYABLE

Falling is probably one of the biggest causes for concern as you age at home. The key is to find preventative ways to avoid this from happening. Depending on your individual needs, the changes you make to your home could range from simple and inexpensive purchases from any retail store to more extensive renovation projects. However, the independence that these changes can provide cannot be labeled with a price tag.

Simple home adaptations may include:

- + Grab Bars
- + Non-Slip Rugs
- + Ramps

Assistive Technologies- grabbers, shower seats, in-home or activity monitoring devices, chair lifts, etc.

**Walk-In Tubs and Showers** are perhaps the most important change you can make to your home. Seniors can naturally feel unsafe taking baths or showers, and often end up procrastinating or avoiding the act altogether. This may lead to embarrassment, social isolation, depression, and a lowered immune system that typically results in illness.

A May 1999 New England Journal of Medicine study actually described the tremendous benefits of bathing with jets for seniors.

- ⊕ When bathing with jets for just six minutes, blood pressure lowers and pulse rates drop
- ⊕ When bathing with jets for just eight minutes, circulation begins to improve and the hands and feet begin to warm up.
- ⊕ When bathing with jets for just 12 minutes, the muscles begin to relax, releasing lactic acid and other toxins that build up in the muscles themselves. Bodily tissues become more pliable as well. The jets can actually help restore and increase the ease of your movements.
- ⊕ When bathing with jets for just 15 minutes, minor aches and pain begin to diminish.

Adapting your home to meet your changing health and physical needs is one simple way to increase your independence all while providing you with a sense of comfort and

security in your home. Maybe the best, and least expensive change you can make is relocating your bedroom and primary bathroom to the first floor of your home. But, no matter what changes you decide to make to your home, it's important to feel like you can live your life to the fullest every moment you are there.



## 6 A REAL SOCIAL NETWORK DOESN'T INCLUDE A COMPUTER SCREEN

Building a group of old and new friends around you is essential to your mental, emotional, and social health. Having people around you to share a meal, play a game, or take a walk with can provide you with companionship day to day. Maintaining meaningful relationships with old and new friends is one great way to stay active and feel alive, as you grow older. Life's adventures don't have to end back in the good ole' days.

“A FRIEND IS SOMEONE WHO GIVES YOU TOTAL FREEDOM TO BE YOURSELF.”

**-JIM MORRISON**



### FRIENDS CAN IMPACT YOUR LIFE BY PROVIDING YOU:

As you get older, you may find it difficult to keep up friendships from years ago. Good friends may move away to new locations, and death is a sad part of life. But, new friendships can grow in unlikely places. Volunteering at a local community centre, joining a club, or taking a class is the perfect way to start up a new friendship.

- MOTIVATION**
- ENCOURAGEMENT**
- ENTERTAINMENT**
- ACCOUNTABILITY**

## 7 A HOBBY CAN BE GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH AND POCKETBOOK

After retirement, life may start to slow down for you. When you are young, there are so many things that keep you busy. In those days, you probably spent your free moments wishing there were more hours in the day. Those long work weeks are gone, so what will you fill your time with?

Pursing a hobby or interest could be just the time-filler you need to pass the time by and give you something to focus on during the day-to-day. Plus, taking on a new venture like woodworking, knitting, pottery, or cooking could have a bigger impact on your life than you imagine.



### WHAT CAN A HOBBY DO FOR YOU?

Hobbies can be therapeutic. For many people, taking on a hobby can become a stress-reliever; a release from the many other concerns that may come with the aging process.

Hobbies can offer a sense of purpose and fulfillment. If you've made the decision to retire, or are headed down that path in the near future, you may wonder what to do next. When you pursue a hobby or special interest, you will be setting regular goals for yourself, and challenging yourself in new ways.

Hobbies can provide you with extra cash in your wallet. If you have a particular hobby that you're skilled at, you could sell your talents for extra income. Whether you teach piano lessons, build picnic tables, or knit scarves, there are plenty of people who may be interested in paying you for the very thing you love to do!

Hobbies can help you fulfill a lifelong dream put on hold. Did you have a job or family circumstances that prevented you from pursuing a dream in the past? Once you've retired, you have more available time and financial resources to pour into those things that you've always wanted to do. Go and travel Europe or restore a classic car. Follow your heart and do something you've always wanted to do.

## 8 SURROUND YOURSELF WITH SUPPORT OF FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND PROFESSIONALS

You've probably spent most of your life taking care of others. And now, at this new stage in life, it's time to take care of you. Part of this involves knowing when to ask others for help. What are your limitations? Be honest with yourself. Identifying these things could be the key to maintaining independence and staying healthy well into your senior years. Experiencing a serious injury, like breaking a hip or getting a concussion, could be detrimental to your independence.



### DETERMINE IF SOME EXTRA HELP IS A GOOD THING...

- + Do I have health needs that need to be considered?
- + Who is nearby and available in case of emergencies?
- + Can a professional person do this job more efficiently and safely than I can?
- + Could I be injured doing this task?

You may have had experience roofing houses before, but now is the time

where you may need to employ the help of a professional roofer. One way to stay independent longer is to make sure you don't put your health at risk doing something that someone else could easily do for you.



## **DIETARY CHANGES, AGING BODIES, AND A NUTRITIONIST'S ADVICE**

Let's face it. You probably don't have the energy of a 25-year-old anymore, nor should you. As you've gotten older, your body has slowed down some and your health is changing. One simple, yet important step you can take to restore a little vitality to your years is to talk to a nutritionist about your changing diet. Doing so may be able to increase your energy and promote good health as well.

### **DO YOU REALLY NEED TO TALK TO A NUTRITIONIST ABOUT FOOD?**

Yes. Yes. Yes! You should most definitely consider speaking with a trained nutritionist to discover what the best diet is for your changing health needs. You may already be eating fairly healthy, but there are many other factors to consider besides meeting your daily servings of fruits and veggies.

-  Appetite changes could lead to malnourishment or over-eating for your body's needs
-  Portion sizes should be adjusted appropriately as your metabolism slows
-  Digestive system changes could affect the types of foods you can safely (and easily) eat
-  Specific nutrients, vitamins, and minerals can each provide unique health benefits as you age

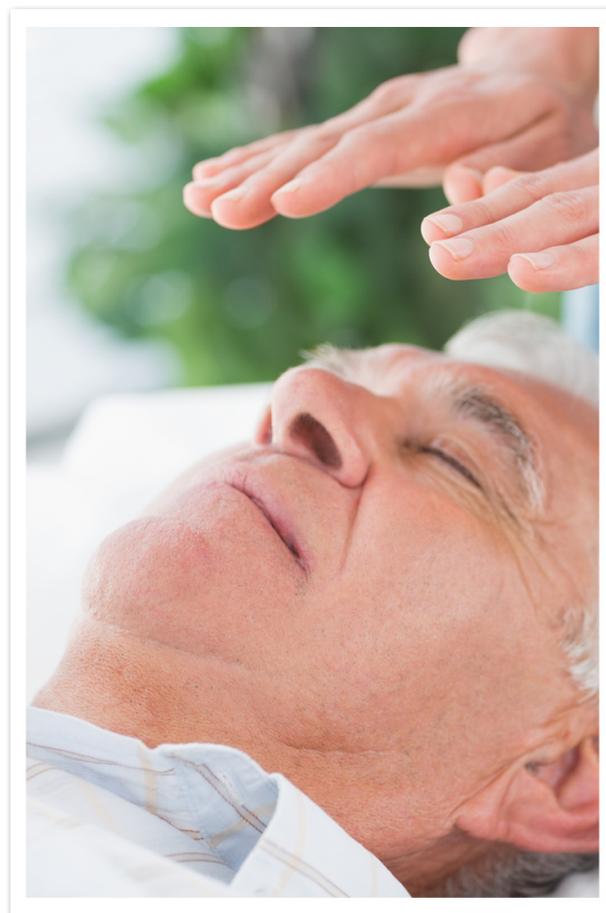
A nutritionist can look at your medications, any existing medical conditions, and

lifestyle needs specific to you, and help create a customized, practical diet that will work for you and help you reach optimum health during this season of life. Your nutritionist will also help you determine whether or not you should add any vitamins or supplements to your daily diet.



# 10 SPIRITUALITY CAN BE A NATURAL STRESS RELIEVER

You may or may not have ever considered yourself to be a “religious” person. That’s okay. Some people find comfort, peace, purpose and hope while attending an organized church, mosque, synagogue, or other religious centre. Others find these things through a more private, inward search. And still, others may find these through other means like daily rituals or routines, or regular experiences like watching sporting events regularly. Spirituality looks different for everyone. But, no matter the means, studies have shown that exploring spirituality can also have a positive impact on one’s physical, emotional and mental health.



## WHY CONSIDER EXPLORING A PATH OF SPIRITUALITY IN YOUR SENIOR YEARS?

**Purpose:** Exploring spirituality can help you keep your life in perspective, giving you a sense of calling for how you spend your days. This purpose may cause you to set personal goals, give to others, or change burdensome lifestyle habits.

**Health & Relaxation:** Spirituality often features specific practices, like prayer and meditation, which have been connected to reduced stress levels and better coping skills. If you are able to handle life's stresses easier, you may be able to heal from illnesses more quickly, and even prevent some medical problems from developing.

**Community:** By joining a community of believers on any particular path, you can create new friendships, and find a sense of belonging amongst a community of people. The community of like-minded individuals on the same spiritual path you've chosen can provide you with the companionship, encouragement, accountability, and active communication you need on a regular basis.

Spiritual practice can help you find hope in the midst of sadness or frustration, positivity instead of negativity, and happiness instead of sadness. In the end, discovering a religious belief that works for you can be good for your mind, body, and soul.

# IN CLOSING

Here at Canadian Safe Step Walk-In Tubs Inc., we believe that each and every individual should be able to live out their senior years with the freedom and vitality they deserve. By providing seniors with Safe-Step tubs and showers, our goal is to provide seniors with a safe and independent bathing experience. We have complete confidence that our tubs and showers can offer seniors with the life-changing freedom they hope for.

