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How to stay sprightly in your 40s



Take better care of your health with these advice from the doctors at Mount Elizabeth Hospitals. PHOTO: MOUNT ELIZABETH HOSPITALS

🕒 PUBLISHED MAY 6, 2019, 4:00 AM SGT

Some necessary tweaks to your lifestyle go a long way to prevent illnesses and injuries

Once you hit your 40s, your hectic lifestyle and poor diet habits tend to catch up with you. Your body is now reacting in new and unpredictable ways. So it's time for you to embrace these changes and make adjustments – like the recommendations below – to ensure that you stay healthy as midlife approaches.

1. SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

Starting from age 40, your usual workout regime may no longer benefit you like it used to. Some loss in muscle strength and mass are expected with ageing, as well as declining performance of the heart and lungs. You will find that your body takes longer to recover from a workout.

Studies have shown that at mid-40s, the overall recovery rate is about 15 per cent slower than a 30-year-old. This recovery rate declines further with age as your body repairs less rapidly, causing you to be more prone to exercise-related injuries.



Do not ignore any signs of prolonged pain and swelling after a workout. PHOTO: ISTOCK

Your exercise should now focus on maintaining muscle mass, flexibility and healthy bone density. After each workout, allow your body to rest for a day or two and make sure you get at least eight hours of sleep each night. A nutritious diet is also key to your body's recovery – think lean protein, whole grains and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Most importantly, always listen to your body.

SIGNS OF EXERCISE BURNOUT:

- decreased performance
- delayed recovery time
- elevated resting heart rate

- fatigue
- weakened immune system

Dr Andrew Dutton an orthopaedic surgeon from Mount Elizabeth Hospital advised that with the right exercise techniques, proper equipment, adequate muscle conditioning and sufficient hydration and nutrition, you can prevent exercise-related injuries. Most importantly, any increase in exercise intensity has to be done slowly and gradually to allow your body to adapt and recover.

“If one develops persistent pain or swelling after exercising despite resting for one to two days, please consult a doctor for an assessment,” he added.

Dr Andrew Dutton is an orthopaedic surgeon practising at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. He has subspecialty interests in arthroscopic and sports surgery, knee and hip replacements, cartilage regeneration and stem cell therapeutics in orthopaedics.

2. BE AWARE AND BEWARE OF RED FLAGS

Colorectal and breast cancers are the most common cancers in Singapore to affect men and women respectively. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death. While cancer can occur at any age, the risks are significantly higher as you get older.

Cancer often has no obvious symptoms so it is important to go for regular cancer screenings for early detection. Especially for those in their 40s, your body and immune system are not as strong as before, thus an early diagnosis can help fight the disease more effectively.



Regular health screenings should be mandatory when you are in your 40s. PHOTO: ISTOCK

RED FLAGS YOU SHOULD NOT IGNORE:

- **Changes to your breast (women)**

Lookout for symptoms of breast cancer such as any lumps around your chest, changes to the skin around your breast, changes to breast's appearance and abnormalities in the nipples.

- **Bloating (women)**

Women tend to bloat more easily than men due to having longer intestines. But if it happens with persistent pelvic or abdominal pain, it could be a sign of ovarian cancer which causes an abnormal build-up of fluid in those areas.

- **Bloody stool (men)**

A warning sign for colon or rectal cancer is blood in the stool. Your stool could also appear dark red or black, indicating the presence of dried blood.

- **Difficulty urinating (men)**

If you face difficulty urinating or there's blood in your urine and semen, these could be symptoms of prostate cancer that you need to get checked.

Dr Melissa Teo, a general surgeon from Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital stressed that screening should be done regularly as medical conditions are more effectively treated when diagnosed early.

“When you hit the big 40, chronic conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol as well as cancers such as cervical, breast and colorectal become more likely to occur. Anyone with symptoms at any age should consult with a doctor immediately,” she added.

Dr Melissa Teo is a general surgeon practising at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital. She is skilled in the management of stomach and colorectal cancers, sarcoma, melanoma and peritoneal disease.

3. RELAX AND RELIEVE STRESS

Singaporeans are among the most stressed at work globally, according to a 2019 survey by health service company Cigna. Nearly 92 per cent of Singaporeans surveyed were stressed by work-related issues. The global average is 84 per cent.

More often than not, you shoulder a longer list of financial commitments when you hit your 40s, especially if you are the breadwinner. Tempers could flare easily for both men and women at this age with declining progesterone levels, which affects your ability to remain calm.



Stress and over-reliance on caffeine can increase the risk of gastric ulcer. PHOTO: ISTOCK

Prolonged stress can have an effect on stomach acid production, causing ulcers and great discomfort. Long term stress also weakens your immune system, so it is best you start practising some relaxation techniques to help calm your mind and body.

WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS AND PREVENT STOMACH ULCERS:

- limit your alcohol consumption
- quit smoking
- cut down on caffeine consumption
- stay physically active (e.g. take a 20-minute stroll daily)
- know your limits

Dr Chua Tju Siang, a gastroenterologist from Mount Elizabeth Hospital, mentioned during a recent radio interview with SPH radio station Kiss92 that several studies have shown that certain type of stresses can increase the risk of developing peptic ulcers. They include depression, work-related stress, social problems and post-traumatic stress disorder.

“Stress increases acid production and hence increase the risk of getting acid reflux symptoms. Moreover, people who are under work stress often take stimulants such as caffeine-based beverages which tend to increase the incidence of reflux symptoms as well,” he added.

Dr Chua Tju Siang is a gastroenterologist practising at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. He has subspecialty expertise in the field of interventional endoscopy including therapeutic endoscopy and endoscopic ultrasonography.

For more information, visit Mount Elizabeth website or call 6250-0000 (Orchard)/6898-6898 (Novena).

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