

A Guide to Managing Your Health

Filipino and Filipino American Older Adults



This information is for older Filipino American people like you, whether you were born in the U.S. or came from the Philippines. You might be more likely to get certain diseases because of things like how you take care of yourself, the healthcare system, where you live, if certain diseases run in your family, or if you moved here from another country. Some health problems that you could have are heart disease, diabetes, obesity, gout, tuberculosis, and hepatitis B.

When you go to see a healthcare professional, make sure to tell them about any health issues you have, things that are important to your culture, and any questions you have. Your healthcare professional needs this information to give you the best care and help you stay healthy.

We will talk about some common diseases among Filipino Americans and ways to talk to your healthcare professional about your health.

Common Healthcare Concerns of Filipino Americans

Breast Cancer

Filipino Americans are more likely to die from breast cancer compared to other Asian American groups. This might be because they don't get checked for breast cancer as often using a mammogram, which is like an x-ray of the breast.

Even though older adults don't always need a mammogram, it's important to talk to your healthcare professional to figure out if you should get one. Your healthcare professional will ask you questions like:

- When you had your last mammogram.
- If you ever had a strange mammogram or had cancer.

- If anyone in your family had breast cancer.

Finding cancer early gives a better chance of successful treatment.

- If you notice any new symptoms, talk to your healthcare professional. If you ignore them, it might be harder to find and treat the cancer.
- If you have any of these symptoms, see your healthcare professional right away: finding a lump in your breast, having trouble breathing, coughing a lot or coughing up blood, or finding blood in your urine or feces (poop).
- Ask your healthcare professional to check for cancer so they can find it early.

To lower your chances of getting cancer, don't drink alcohol, stop smoking, eat less salt and fat, and eat more fruits and vegetables.

Depression and Anxiety

As you get older, you may experience feelings of sadness, tiredness, irritability, or lack of interest in things you used to enjoy. These symptoms might be caused by chemical imbalances in your brain, which can lead to depression or anxiety.

Depression is a serious health condition and can lead to other health problems. Symptoms of depression can include:

- Feeling sad, tired, or irritable
 - Lacking interest in hobbies and activities you used to enjoy
 - Having trouble sleeping or sleeping too long
 - Having a poor appetite
 - Having thoughts of suicide
 - Being confused or having problems with thinking.
- These symptoms can appear to be dementia.

If you are feeling anxious or depressed, or if you have thoughts of hurting yourself or others, it is important to talk to a healthcare professional. They can suggest counseling and medications to help you feel better. Your family and friends can also support you during this time.

Some Filipino Americans may feel ashamed or embarrassed to seek help for mental health issues, but it is important to remember that depression and anxiety are treatable conditions. Medications and therapy can help you feel better and improve your mental health.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a condition that can make your blood sugar levels high, which can cause damage to your eyes, kidneys, and heart. It can get worse if you eat unhealthy food, don't exercise, or are overweight.

To stay healthy, talk to your healthcare professional about eating well, exercising, and taking any medications you need. Some tips are:

- Eat less carbs like rice, white bread, and pasta
- Eat more veggies and low-calorie foods

- Drink water or sugar-free drinks instead of sugary ones

- Exercise for 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Any physical activity is good for you.

Your healthcare professional will check your blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and kidney function. You should also check your feet every day and tell your healthcare professional right away if you notice any skin problems. And don't forget to get your eyes checked every 1 to 2 years.

Gout

Gout happens when abnormal substances called urate crystals collect in your joints. These crystals cause inflammation and intense pain. Gout is more common in Filipino American populations than in other groups.

Diet and some medications for heart disease and high blood pressure can cause an attack of gout.

People who have gout may need medicine to treat an attack or prevent future ones. Changes to diet can help prevent attacks.

Heart Disease and Stroke

If you have high blood pressure, heart failure, diabetes, overweight or obesity, smoke, or don't exercise much, you are at a higher risk of having a heart attack or stroke. It is important to eat foods that are low in fat and salt. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables and try to limit your meat and sweet intake.

Filipino food is delicious, but you may need to make some changes if your healthcare professional recommends it. For alcohol, women should limit themselves to one drink per day, while men can have up to two drinks. There are other things you can do to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. Be sure to exercise regularly, stop smoking, control your blood pressure, and take any medications your healthcare professional recommends. Talk to your healthcare professional about how to reduce your risks and follow their advice.

It's important to know about things that can hurt your health right away. If you feel chest pain or have trouble breathing, you could be having a heart

attack. If this happens, you should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room immediately.

Strokes occur when the blood flow to the brain is blocked. Brain cells can die very quickly. If you have trouble speaking, weakness on one side of your body, a severe headache, or lose your vision or balance, you should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a sickness that can spread through things like blood or saliva. Sometimes when a mom with Hepatitis B has a baby, the baby can get it too. It's really important to get tested and vaccinated for Hepatitis B.

If you don't get treated for Hepatitis B, you could have big problems with your liver when you get older. Asian immigrant groups are more likely to have untreated Hepatitis B.

Make sure to tell your healthcare professional if you have never been tested or vaccinated for Hepatitis B.

Over Weight and Obesity

Eating too much food can make you gain weight and become too heavy. Eating foods with lots of sugar and fat or drinking sugary drinks can also make you gain weight. Not moving around much and not sleeping well can also make you gain weight.

If you are too heavy, you can get sick with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, heart disease, sleep apnea (problems breathing while asleep), and even cancer. Being too heavy can also make it hard to breathe and make arthritis pain and walking harder.

Talk to your healthcare professional about ways to lose weight and get healthier. Some tips to lose weight include:

- Eating less unhealthy food and more fruits and veggies, eating 500 fewer calories each day, and getting advice from a dietitian.
- Try to exercise for 30 minutes a day by walking or doing other types of physical activities. It's also important to do exercises like lifting weights to keep your muscles strong as you get older.

- Consider joining a Silver Sneakers exercise program, which some insurance plans cover. You can also see a physical therapist to create a personalized exercise plan. You can find free exercise videos online to help you work out at home.

Preventive Health

Taking care of your health before you get sick is important. By seeing your healthcare professional every year, you can catch diseases early and get treatment before they get worse. This will help you stay healthier and have better results.

Your healthcare professional will talk to you about preventive healthcare. For example:

- They might recommend getting screened for cancer. This could involve tests like mammograms, prostate exams, or colonoscopies.
- It's also important to get vaccinated to prevent serious infections like the flu, pneumonia, shingles, RSV, and COVID-19. If you have any concerns about vaccines, you can talk to your healthcare professional for more information.
- If you take any home remedies, herbs, vitamins, or supplements, make sure to tell your healthcare professional and pharmacist. They can help you make sure that these remedies are safe to use with your other medications.

Tuberculosis (TB)

Tuberculosis is a very contagious infection that can spread through the air. If you have symptoms like coughing up blood, losing weight, or sweating a lot at night, tell your healthcare professional right away.

In the Philippines and some parts of the United States, a lot of people have tuberculosis but don't have symptoms. This means they can't infect others, but they are at risk of getting sick in the future.

If you have ever had tuberculosis before, let your healthcare professional know. They may need to give you treatment to help prevent it from coming back.

Talking to Your Healthcare Team

Your healthcare team can include physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, nursing assistants, social workers, pharmacists, therapists, and others. Each team member has special training to help you in different ways.

Your healthcare team will want to know about you, your culture, and what is important to you! You will receive the best care by sharing your cultural beliefs and health care practices. These beliefs and practices can affect your health and healthcare treatments. See the Tip Sheet on Cultural Considerations when Communicating with Your Healthcare Team for helpful suggestions.

Note that if you have immigrated to the United States, your immigration history may be an important part of your personal story. If your healthcare professional knows your history, that will let them know if you have an increased risk of diseases that are common in other countries. It will also help your healthcare professional to know how much access you had to health care before coming to the United States. This information can be sensitive, but we encourage you to share this with your healthcare professional.

**We hope this information has been helpful to you.
Be sure to let your healthcare providers know if you
or your family members have any questions.**



40 FULTON STREET
SUITE 809
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212.308.1414 TEL

Info@healthinaging.org
www.healthinaging.org

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