

A Head-to-Toe Guide to Preventive Health

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Experts agree that some day-to-day choices may help improve quality of life over time by lowering the risk or impact of certain health issues. “Simple habits may give you a real sense of control of your health,” says David Blais, Assistant Vice President at Manulife Canada. Dr. Steve Pomedli, Cleveland Clinic Canada, the medical director for Manulife Canada’s Group Benefits, adds that even small actions can support health—and with some, the benefits can be felt within just days or weeks. Dr. Pomedli walks through some everyday preventive habits, from head to toe.

The Brain

An action with big impact: “Staying socially connected has a powerful effect on brain health and reduces the risk of dementia, depression, and anxiety¹. Stimulation from these social connections can also help slow cognitive decline as we get older by activating cognitive processes associated with attention, language and memory².”

Easy habit to add: “Engaging in even 15 to 20 minutes of physical activity each day can reduce the risk of dementia by up to 20%³. While almost everyone can benefit from added physical activity, the biggest benefits can be gained by people who were mostly sedentary and start moving more⁴”

Oral health

An action with big impact: “Quitting smoking has major health benefits, and this includes oral health. Smoking increases the risk of throat and tongue cancer, periodontal disease, and tooth decay⁵. Quitting isn’t easy, but support is available and it’s absolutely worth the effort.”

Easy habit to add: “Brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste helps prevent cavities, and good oral hygiene from regularly brushing and flossing reduces inflammation in the mouth, which is linked with cardiovascular diseases and other chronic conditions⁶.”

***Tip!** An [individual health and dental plan](#) can help cover appointments and procedures that support preventive health. It can also be a useful addition to group benefits coverage, if you have specific needs.*

The Immune System

An action with big impact: “Vaccination helps reduce the risk of serious illness and hospitalization in adults . For most adults⁷, a tetanus booster should be scheduled every 10 years, and annual flu shots can reduce the impact of infection on ourselves and those around us. Ask your doctor about additional vaccines depending on your situation, such as ones that protect against hepatitis A and B, HPV, shingles or respiratory illnesses.”

Easy habit to add: “Quality sleep strengthens the immune system and the production of protective antibodies⁸. Most adults need seven to nine hours of sleep a night⁹, though this varies according to age and individuals.”

The Heart

An action with big impact: “High blood pressure gradually damages the blood vessels that supply vital organs, increasing risk of heart attack, stroke, and kidney failure¹⁰. Getting more control over your blood pressure requires a comprehensive approach: reducing alcohol intake and tobacco use, eating well, maintaining a healthy weight, staying active daily, and managing stress¹¹.”

Easy habit to add: “The Mediterranean diet provides an excellent basis for keeping your arteries healthy¹² by emphasizing vegetables and fruits, whole grains, legumes, healthy fats, plus herbs and spices instead of salt. No need to change everything overnight: incorporating some of this diet’s core principles can be done gradually.”

Tip! Check if your [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) or group benefits plan offers support for building healthier habits that last. For example, dietician consultations and smoking cessation products may be covered.

The Gut

An action with big impact: “Screening tests often make it possible to detect colorectal cancers at an earlier stage, while they’re easier to treat¹³. In Canada, colorectal cancer screening is recommended starting at 50, but if you have a family history or certain risk factors, your doctor may suggest it earlier.”

Easy habit to add: “Eat more fibre by focusing on vegetables, legumes, and whole grains. Fibre supports gut health and helps lower the risk of colon cancer, diverticulosis, and diabetes¹⁴.”

Your Bones

An action with big impact: “Weight-bearing exercises help slow down the loss of bone density that occurs gradually with age¹⁵. Bones are living tissues that can be stimulated by physical activity and movement. Strength training is among the best ways to optimize bone density and reduce the risk of fractures.

Easy habit to add: “Vitamin D is essential for maintaining bone mass. Natural sunlight and some foods provide vitamin D, but supplements can help you get an adequate amount¹⁶. This is often necessary for Canadian adults year-round, due to the limited sunlight during winter months.”

Small Habits with Major Benefits

Being aware of the preventive actions you take can have a big impact. Fewer than 1 in 20 Canadian adults meet the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines regarding physical activity, limited sedentary time, and sleep¹⁷, all of which can have a major benefit on long term health outcomes. “Starting small really is a great thing you can do to start gaining control over your health,” says David Blais.

Helpful Tools to Support Your Health Journey

[Manulife Vitality](#)

This program, available to Manulife individual insurance customers, encourages small steps toward a longer, healthier life by providing helpful tools, resources and rewards for healthy actions.

[Manulife Mobile App](#)

For group benefits plan members, the mobile app offers a variety of health challenges and health tips, and the chance to earn Aeroplan® points when you complete rewardable activities.

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Cleveland Clinic Canada

Manulife is proud to have Cleveland Clinic Canada on board as Medical Director for our Group Benefits operations. Cleveland Clinic Canada has a wealth of global healthcare expertise and shares our goal to help Canadians live longer, healthier, and better lives. Cleveland Clinic is a nonprofit organization that has been at the forefront of modern medicine since 1921. In recent years, Cleveland Clinic has worked with progressive companies in Canada and around the world to prioritize the health and well-being of their employees, customers, and communities.

SOURCES

¹ [The impact of loneliness and social isolation on the development of cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s Disease - ScienceDirect](#)

² [3 ways to build brain-boosting social connections - Harvard Health](#)

[3 Physical Exercise as a Preventive or Disease-Modifying Treatment of Dementia and Brain Aging - PMC](#)

[4 Adults 18-64 – 24-Hour Movement Guidelines](#)

[5 Tobacco and Oral Disease - Canada.ca](#)

[6 Oral Hygiene: Best Practices & Instructions for Good Routine](#)

[7 Vaccination for adults - Canada.ca](#)

[8 Sleep: What It Is, Why It's Important, Stages, REM & NREM](#)

[9 Are Canadian adults getting enough sleep? Infographic - Canada.ca](#)

[10 Health effects of high blood pressure - Canada.ca](#)

[11 Prevention of heart diseases and conditions - Canada.ca](#)

[12 Mediterranean Diet: Food List & Meal Plan](#)

[13 Screening for Colorectal Cancer - Canada.ca](#)

[14 Eat more veggies fruit and fibre | Canadian Cancer Society](#)

[15 Osteoporosis - Canada.ca](#)

[16 Vitamin D - Canada.ca](#)

[17 Tracking health through daily movement behaviour: A data blog using the Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Sleep \(PASS\) Indicators — Canada.ca](#)