



help!
am I destined to...
gain weight?
leak when I laugh?
get hot flashes?

In a word: no! Ease—and even prevent—some of the most common symptoms of aging with these simple strategies.

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN
PHOTOILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS STEIN



Kegel exercises can go a long way toward making sure you don't leak.

Say *middle age* and the first thing that may come to mind is a host of health issues. But you *do* have some control over how your body ages. “Up to 75% of our health destiny is determined by our daily diet and lifestyle choices. Family history accounts for only about 20% to 25%,” says Andrew Weil, MD, founder of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Center. So even though you’ll likely experience some of these symptoms, there are ways you can fight back.

am I destined to... leak when I laugh?

Laughing is fun. Peeing while you laugh definitely is not. Though it’s true that as we age, the decline in estrogen weakens the muscles surrounding your bladder, the statistics on women who experience incontinence aren’t →

terrible. According to a review of 22 studies, 28% of women age 50 and younger and 35% of women older than 50 will experience leaking. If you've had kids, you're more at risk because of structural changes that happen in your body during labor and delivery. Genetics also plays a part in age-related incontinence, explains Eric Braverman, MD, clinical assistant professor of integrative medicine at Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York and author of *Younger Brain, Sharper Mind*.

PREVENT IT Thankfully, those tried-and-true Kegel exercises can really help. A 2011 *World Journal of Urology* study found that three sets of eight to 12 Kegels, done three times daily for four to six months, helped decrease urinary incontinence by up to 80%. Study author Kari Bø, PhD, says that the same routine holds promise for preventing the problem in the first place. To isolate and work the right muscles, imagine that you're urinating and try to stop the flow, then hold for 10 seconds.

More strategies to consider trying: Magnesium supplements and dietary fiber (in supplements or foods like oatmeal, whole-grain breads and cereals) may help by fighting constipation and relieving pressure in the pelvic area that can contribute to incontinence. "Magnesium has also been proven to help slow down an overactive bladder, which helps prevent sudden urges," says Dr. Braverman. He recommends starting with 500 mg magnesium daily, and slowly increasing to 2,000 mg if necessary. The strongest dietary sources include nuts and whole grains—1 oz almonds contains 80 mg magnesium; 1 cup cooked instant oatmeal has 61 mg. You may need to take a supplement since the 500–2,000 mg target is hard to hit through food alone, but of course talk to your doctor before taking anything. As for fiber, aim for at least 25 g daily. (One cup of cooked black beans delivers 15 g; a cup of raspberries, 8 g; and one cup of brown rice, 3.5 g)



Fanning the flames of hot flashes? Nix spicy foods and lower the thermostat before bed.



am I destined to... get hot flashes the minute menopause hits?

At least 75% of women will experience these sudden is-it-hot-in-here flare-ups of sweating, which are the result of fluctuating hormone levels that lead up to menopause. You can also thank Mom: Research suggests that a woman is four times more likely to have hot flashes if her mother did, too.

PREVENT IT Even so, "just because your mother had hot flashes doesn't mean you're destined to suffer," explains Jodi Flaws, PhD, a menopause researcher at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Many lifestyle factors can affect whether or not you get them and how severe they are. "Emerging research, for instance, suggests that heavier women may get more frequent and intense hot flashes, so

staying at a healthy weight can reduce your odds," says Dr. Flaws. Smokers are also more likely to experience them—the longer you've smoked, the greater your risk.

If you do get hot flashes, there are steps to take so that you're not always peeling off your clothes or waking up drenched. Dress in layers so you can cool down quickly; dial down the thermostat before you go to bed; and limit your intake of alcohol, hot drinks and spicy foods, as they're common hot-flash culprits, says Emily Szmulowicz, MD, assistant professor of endocrinology, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Stress can also be a hot-flash trigger," she adds. So find the time for a little relaxation in your daily life. Ten minutes of deep breathing, yoga or meditation can all help decrease how often hot flashes happen and how bad they are. →

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And before you start cursing yourself for being such a hot mess, consider this: Women who have hot flashes toward the beginning of menopause have a lower risk of cardiovascular disease than women who never have them.

am I destined to... get a spare tire around my middle?

It can be pretty hard not to gain weight starting in your 40s, and you can blame the drop in estrogen (again!) and the slowdown in your metabolism that happens as you head toward menopause. Even worse, the extra fat tends to land in your tummy. But it's definitely not inevitable, says Paul Williams, PhD, staff scientist at University of California's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

PREVENT IT Daily exercise will go a long way toward nipping those extra pounds in the bud, says Dr. Williams. "In our research, women whose moms are overweight or obese are 36% less likely to wind up with their mom's current Body Mass Index [BMI, a measure of body fat based on height and weight] if they walk 3K [a little less than 2 miles] per day." Add two to three 20-minute sessions of strength training, doing exercises like push-ups in which you work against your own body weight, lifting free

weights or using resistance bands. This will build muscle, which helps boost your metabolism; it also strengthens your bones, which can help prevent osteoporosis. Keep in mind that any exercise you do will help trim the fat from your belly, so there's no need to become obsessed with doing 100 crunches a day.

Also pay more attention to what you're eating. Back when you were in your 20s and 30s, an extra 50 or 100 calories a day probably didn't make much of a difference. But if the number on the scale is now going up, track what you're eating and cut those 50 to 100 calories—a slice of cheese, a piece of bread.

Another important way to fight middle-age spread: Log extra zzz's. Your body's production of appetite-regulating hormones such as leptin can go a bit haywire with age, but solid sleep can keep things on an even keel. Studies show that aiming for about 7 hours is best.

Avoid late-night dinners, too. They can aggravate acid reflux (lying down relaxes your esophageal sphincter, which normally stops stomach acid from creeping up) and challenge your body's desire to wind down. "Eat dinner at least three hours before bed so your system can focus on relaxing itself, not on digesting food," explains Beth Reardon, RD, director of integrative nutrition at Duke Integrative Medicine.



Walk 30 minutes daily to avoid gaining that spare tire.



am I destined to...
**have those
“senior moments”?**

Sure, we all tend to temporarily forget things like where we put our keys or parked the car at the mall. But rest assured that these are not the signs of impending Alzheimer’s disease. “Forgetting a friend’s name is simple memory loss; a more severe disease would cause you to lose all memory of life experiences with that friend,” says Donald Aulds, MD, medical director of the Huntsville Hospital Women’s Center in Huntsville, AL. Far more likely memory stealers: stress and fatigue.

PREVENT IT First, make sure you’re getting a good night’s sleep. Start winding down for bed 30 minutes before turning in, and remove all sources of light—computers, cell phones, backlit clocks—from your bedroom. During your day, weave in some exercise. Research from the Mayo Clinic has found that almost any amount of moderate exercise, such as walking at a brisk pace for 30 minutes, can slash your odds of mild cognitive impairment (the stage between normal aging and dementia) by 30% to 40%.

As far as your diet is concerned, fuel up with fish, vegetables, beans and olive oil. An *Archives of Neurology* study found that older Americans who ate a Mediterranean-style diet had a lower risk of mild cognitive impairment. And pick up that crossword puzzle, read the newspaper, lay a board game or do anything that gets your brain going. When researchers at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York surveyed 488 healthy adults aged 73 to 87, they found that for every round of “cognitive activity” that the subjects did per week, the onset of memory loss associated with dementia was delayed by two months.

am I destined to...
**have achy,
creaky joints?**

Joint pain and a feeling of “creakiness” can increase with age since the tissues around our joints stiffen, but “it isn’t by any means 100% sure to happen,” assures Patience H. White, MD, vice president for public health at the Arthritis Foundation. Being sedentary and overweight ups your odds: Every extra pound is the equivalent to carrying 4 pounds across your knees, so a 5-pound weight gain feels like 20 to your lower joints. “People who are overweight and slim down can cut their pain in half,” notes Dr. White.

PREVENT IT Your muscles help protect your joints from wear and tear, so the stronger your muscles, the less likely you are to have pain. Strength training for 20 minutes at least twice a week is key. Stretching can relieve achiness (for some effective moves, check out our exercise routine on page 142), as will regular walking. Aim for 30 minutes, five times a week, at a rate fast enough to make you slightly out of breath. And don’t play weekend warrior! It’s less of a strain on your joints to work out in small spurts throughout the week than to suddenly walk five miles on Saturday.

For the occasional ache or pain, try taking acetaminophen; ibuprofen can increase the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. If you’re in constant pain and have limited mobility, it’s time to see your MD, who may consider using anti-inflammatory steroid injections. And, though joint pain is not always a surefire sign of impending arthritis, you should get checked out by an MD if you experience redness, swelling and heat around a joint. ✨

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