

Learning About Frailty

What is frailty?

Older adults may tire quickly and move more slowly as they age. Everyday activities like shopping or even getting dressed can become hard to do. This may be a health problem called frailty.

Experts think frailty develops because of changes in how your body works. These changes can be caused by aging, a disease or both. Your organs may not do their jobs as well, and you may lose muscle. Frailty also involves:

- Changes in your body's endocrine system, which releases the hormones or chemicals that affect how your body functions.
- Inflammation or damage to the cells and tissues in your body.

What are the symptoms?

You may be frail if you have lost weight, are weak or feel like you have low energy. The way you feel when you're frail may make you more likely to have depression.

What happens when you become frail?

When you are frail, you may have trouble doing everyday tasks like getting dressed, eating, bathing, getting in or out of bed or using the toilet. You may feel weak and off-balance and worry about falling.

If you also have another health problems, your frailty may get worse quickly.

How can you care for yourself?

If you think you are becoming frail, see your doctor. There are things you and your doctor can do to prevent frailty or slow it down.

If frailty is caused or made worse by another health problem, you and your doctor can treat the problem.

Talk to your doctor about any medicines you're taking that might be making you feel tired. Many medicines, such as cold and allergy medicines, often cause fatigue.

Eat healthy

Food gives you calories, which provide energy and can help stop weight loss. Here are some tips for eating well:

- Eat more. Getting calories may be more important than avoiding fat for other reasons. But talk to your doctor about any changes you'd like to make in what you eat.
- Eat more protein. This will help you keep your muscles strong.
- Try liquid meal replacements, such as Boost, Ensure or instant breakfast drinks. Smoothies, milk shakes and milk also may help you limit weight loss.
- If it's easier for you, eat smaller meals several times a day, rather than larger meals 3 times a day. Do not skip meals, especially breakfast.

Stay active

Talk to your doctor about exercises to help build your strength and balance like:

- Resistance exercises, such as pushing against a wall or sitting in a chair and raising your legs. These are easy ways to tone your muscles.
- Walking, which can be good for your body, but ask your doctor how often and how much walking is best for you.
- Tai chi, which is moving in a slow, rhythmic way, can help with muscle tone and balance.

Prevent falls

If you are worried about falling, here are some things you can do:

- Keep your bones strong. Talk to your doctor to be sure you are getting enough vitamin D and calcium.
- Take out raised doorway thresholds and get rid of throw rugs.
- If stairs are a problem, put in handrails or a ramp.
- Arrange your furniture and electric cords to keep them out of walking paths.
- Keep your house well lit, especially stairways, porches, and outside walkways. Use night lights in hallways and washrooms.
- Use shower chairs and bath benches.

Stay connected

When you feel tired, it's often easier to stay home and not see people. But it is important to connect with others and stay positive. Being with other people can help you feel good and may help you stay healthier as you age.

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information call Health Link at 811.

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