

5 trends for the 50-plus

By Vanessa Caceres

In the quest to lead a healthy and active life, those who are 50 and older find themselves in the unique position of living longer but most likely with at least one condition to take care of.

Thanks to healthier choices and advanced medicine, people are celebrating more birthdays; however, that usually means living with at least one chronic condition, such as diabetes or high cholesterol, said refractive surgeon Marguerite B. McDonald, MD, of Ophthalmic Consultants of Long Island in Lynbrook.

The knowledge that many in the 50-and-over crowd will have to manage a long-term chronic condition leads to more preventive screenings and a quest for better overall health—and a desire to manage all of one's health information quickly.

Here's the skinny on five healthcare trends that affect this population.

More preventive care

Baby boomers want to know their health risks as early as possible, said healthcare consultant Michael T. Irvin, RN, of New York City. "We are actually seeing the 50-plus age group trying to treat their bodies as well as they do their cars," he said. "This age group is seeking more preventive care in the form of cancer screening, blood pressure checks, blood sugar checks, and physical exams."

Irvin has seen those in this group even give each other gifts of doctor checkups and visits for their birthdays, anniversaries, and other occasions.

The interest in preventive care leads some people to places like Life Line Screening, with various locations on

Long Island, to screen for conditions like osteoporosis, peripheral coronary artery disease, and atrial fibrillation, said Andy Manganaro, MD, chief medical officer with Life Line Screening.

Patients over the age of 50 often follow screening guidelines for diseases such as cancer, said Jennie Ann Freiman, MD, a gynecologist in New York City. Despite a federal government recommendation to get a mammogram every two years over the age of 50, she and many other physicians favor an annual recommendation, to catch any possible cancer before it advances.

Plus, seeing your primary care doctor and specialists such as eye doctors for regularly scheduled checkups can help catch chronic conditions early on, Dr. McDonald said. In the world of eyes, this could include glaucoma, macular degeneration, cataracts, and dry eye.

Less invasive screenings

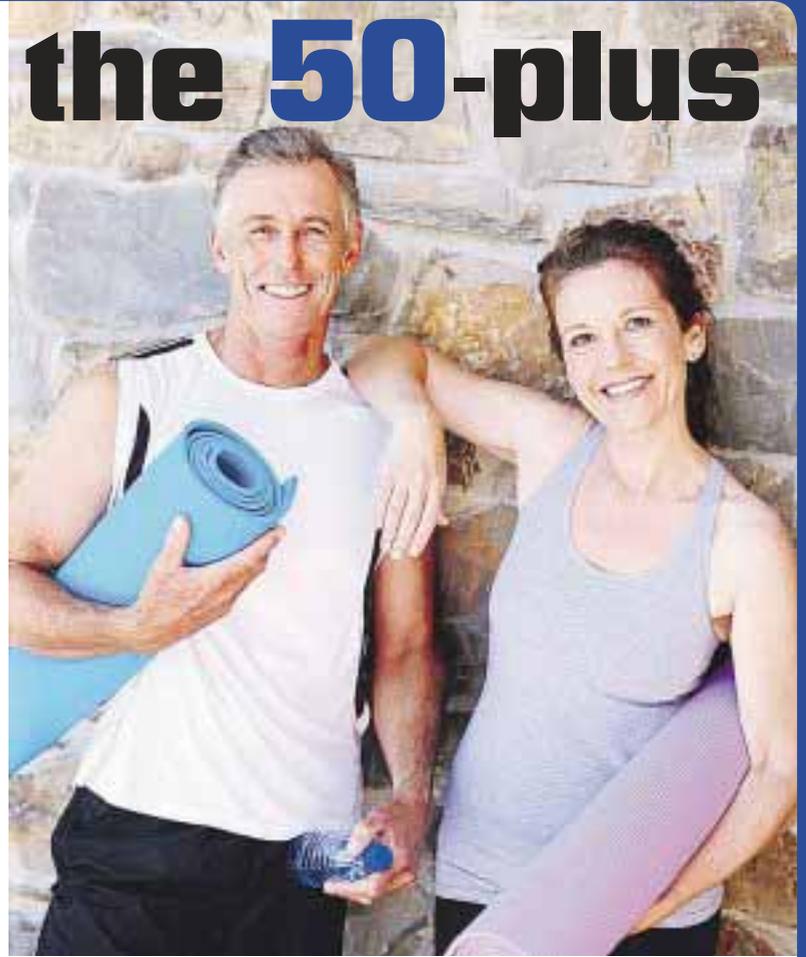
Along with the quest for prevention, those age 50 and older also want health screenings that are easy. If not, they might not do them. That's led medical companies to develop less invasive screenings, like Cologuard, a noninvasive stool DNA screening test for colorectal cancer that was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration earlier this year, said Steven H. Itzkowitz, MD, professor of medicine and oncological sciences at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. Users require a more invasive colonoscopy only if the Cologuard test has a positive result, he said.

In the future, genetic tests for certain diseases, performed with a simple blood test, will become the norm, Freiman said. "In the future with personalized medicine, everything we're doing now will seem like the Stone Age," she said.

More movement

Despite the image of Americans as couch potatoes, many in the 50-plus crowd have found a fountain of youth in the form of exercise and increased movement. Walking, swimming, ballroom dancing, and yoga are all excellent ways that many are staying active, said Anne Kelly, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at the Long Island office of the Hospital for Special Surgery in Uniondale.

Still, she wishes some of these



patients who haven't exercised for a long time would move in baby steps. "It's amazing the number of people who don't do anything and then go right to jumping," Kelly said.

Increased movement at work is another trend, said James Wyss, MD, a physiatrist who is also with the Long Island office of the Hospital for Special Surgery. He's had patients ask him about the use of sit-to-stand work stations, treadmill desks, and even sitting physioballs (also known as yoga balls). Wyss encourages their use so long as the work stations are set up ergonomically correctly.

Personalized care

With doctors squeezed for time more than ever, and baby boomers more concerned about their health, it's pushed more patients to concierge care, said Wayne Lipton, founder of Rockville Centre-based Concierge Choice Physicians. In concierge care, patients pay an annual fee to obtain more time with their primary care doctor or certain

physicians and gain access to tests their insurance may not cover. The doctors become somewhat of a "lifestyle coach" for their patients, he said. Lipton also has seen adult patients choosing concierge care for their older parents with various chronic conditions, to make coordination of care and tests easier.

More technology

Forget the image of grandma avoiding a cellphone or computer. "Older patients understand the significance of accepting technology to meet their growing healthcare needs," said Divan Dave, CEO of OmniMD. They are using patient portals, medical kiosks, and patient health records to communicate with providers and keep track of their overall health, Dave said. Plus, those over 50 are tracking their own health with the help of phones and wearable technology. "Today's patient can easily check their heart rate, track their calories, walking goals, sleep goals, and weight loss on their smart phones," Dave said.



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