Evolving, not aging.

If this sounds like you, you are probably a Baby Boomer. Baby Boomers are the 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964, in the relative calm and prosperity following World War II.

Despite their optimistic outlook and general affluence, Baby Boomers face unprecedented health challenges. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 60 percent of adults age 50 to 64 suffer from one or more chronic health conditions. These chronic diseases are among the top causes of death and disability in Boomers.

“Despite their longer life expectancy over previous generations, U.S. baby boomers have higher rates of chronic disease, more disability, and lower self-rated health than members of the previous generation at the same age.”

—Journal of the American Medical Association

Top Health Challenges

**Obesity.** About one-third of Baby Boomers are obese, and many more are overweight. Obesity significantly increases your risk of developing serious, chronic diseases, such as diabetes, congestive heart failure, arthritis and dementia.

**Bone and joint disease.** Osteoarthritis and osteoporosis are common in Boomers. In fact, osteoarthritis is one of the top five causes of disability. Osteoarthritis is a degenerative disease that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in one or more joints.
Bone loss is a normal part of aging, particularly in menopausal women. However, some women (and men) lose too much bone or don’t make enough new bone tissue, which leads to osteoporosis. Osteoporosis renders your bones fragile and significantly increases your risk for fractures in the hip, spine or wrist. Studies suggest approximately 50 percent of women and one in four men over 50 will break a bone due to osteoporosis. These fractures can be serious; half of those who have a hip fracture are unable to walk again without assistance.

**Cancer.** About three-quarters of all cancer diagnoses occur in people 55 and older. Since this segment of the population is growing, the incidence of new cancers in Boomers is expected to increase in the coming years. However, improved treatment means fewer people are actually dying from cancer.

Don’t be discouraged by these facts. All of these serious conditions are largely preventable! For example, the American Association for Cancer Research says that more than 50 percent of cancer deaths and one-third of cancer diagnoses in 2013 were related to preventable causes, such as smoking, diet and lack of exercise.

**Prevent chronic disease. Improve your quality of life.**

It’s never too late to make positive lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of serious illness. Here’s how.

**Get adequate physical activity.** In its State of Aging report, the CDC says, “Regular physical activity is one of the most important things older adults can do for their health. Physical activity can prevent many of the health problems that may come with age.”

Adults should get at least 2½ hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity weekly, or 75 minutes of vigorous activity, along with at least two days of activities that strengthen the major muscle groups. Aerobic exercise, such as walking, biking or swimming, strengthens your heart and the muscles surrounding your joints. Flexibility and balancing activities also reduce your risk of falling.

**Don’t use tobacco products.** Smoking is the single largest preventable cause of disease, death and disability. If you smoke, ask your doctor about smoking cessation aids.

**Maintain a healthy weight.** Losing even 5-10 percent of your excess weight can reduce your risk for disease. If you are overweight or obese, talk to your doctor about how to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

**Stay current on important screenings and immunizations.** Ask your doctor which screenings and immunizations are right for you. Here is a quick overview of the general recommendations for Boomers who have no disease symptoms or are not at high risk. If you have risk factors (for example, you are obese or have a family history), your doctor may suggest a different schedule.

**Cancer.** Health experts recommend screening mammograms every two years for women 50 to 74 and colon cancer screening for men and women between the ages of 50 and 74. There are several colon cancer screening tools, including the colonoscopy. Talk to your doctor about which test is right for you.

**Bone density.** Women should have a bone density test at age 65 or at menopause if they’ve already had a fracture or have risk factors for osteoporosis (such as rheumatoid arthritis, smoking or taking corticosteroid drugs). Men should discuss bone density screening with their doctors at age 70.

**Heart disease.** Regular screening for high blood pressure is important. If your blood pressure is considered in the normal range (less than 120/80), have it checked every other year. However, if your blood pressure is higher than 120/80, it should be checked every year. Talk to your doctor about how often to have your fasting lipoprotein screening for cholesterol and triglycerides, usually every four to six years, unless you have other health risks.

**Diabetes.** If you don’t already have diabetes or prediabetes, check your blood glucose levels every three years.

**Hepatitis B.** The CDC recommends that adults born between 1945 and 1965 be screened for hepatitis B, which can cause serious liver disease. You can live for many years with hepatitis B without experiencing symptoms.

**Shingles vaccine.** The CDC also recommends that adults 60 and older get this one-time vaccine to protect against shingles and post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN).

**Flu and pneumonia vaccine.** Most health experts recommend that middle-age adults get an annual flu shot and the pneumonia vaccine at least once.

**Make an appointment with a healthcare provider to learn which screenings are best for you.**