



BACKGROUND: Frailty is defined as age-related deficits in normal function which can include loss of muscle, stamina, endurance, sometimes weight, and general fitness. It often involves the presence of two or more chronic diseases like cancer, arthritis, or heart disease. Criteria for diagnosis are weakness, slowness, low level of physical activity, easy exhaustion, poor endurance, and loss of weight. Older people contribute in many ways to their families and communities, however, it depends hugely on their health. If people can experience these extra years of life in good health and live in a supportive environment, they will be able to do the things they value well into old age.

(Source: <https://muschealth.org/medical-services/geriatrics-and-aging/healthy-aging/frailty> and <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>)

IDENTIFYING FRAILTY: Research at Johns Hopkins is helping doctors and patients spot frailty sooner. "If we understand the underlying biomedical processes that create frailty, we can develop better interventions - from medications to lifestyle changes," says Samuel Durso, MD, director of geriatric medicine and gerontology at Johns Hopkins. Some concerns to watch out for are if you have unintentionally lost ten or more pounds in the past year; you have trouble standing without assistance or have reduced grip strength; everything you do takes a big effort, or you just can't get going three or more days most weeks; your energy or activity level is low; your pace is slower, such as, it takes you more than six or seven seconds to walk 15 feet. "One cause of frailty is the age-related loss of muscle mass," Durso explains. Research suggests activities like walking and easy strength-training improves strength and reduces weakness.

(Source: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/stay-strong-four-ways-to-beat-the-frailty-risk>)

CHALLENGES OF TREATING FRAILTY AND WAYS TO PREVENT IT: Currently, our healthcare system is not well-designed to handle frailty. And, as a result, frail patients often fall through the cracks. A big challenge is the shortage of physicians who specialize in the care of elderly. The American Geriatrics Society reports that the U.S. has less than half of the 17,000 geriatricians it needs. By 2030, the number needed will increase to 30,000. Frailty is not necessarily a given with old age. It may be possible to reduce the severity of it, or even prevent it entirely, by promoting overall health. Good nutrition plays an important role which means eating a well-balanced, varied diet that includes adequate amounts of calories and protein. Physical exercise has repeatedly been demonstrated to enhance the function of the brain, the endocrine and immune systems, and skeletal muscle. It is also important to promote psychological health, like building relationships with others and cultivating a positive, hopeful outlook on life. These play a big role in helping many older patients stay active and vital.

(Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/12/the-challenge-of-treating-frailty/383327/>)

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