

Aging happily

Many people think of getting older as a bad thing, but it doesn't have to be. In fact, aging can be a gift if you look at it the right way.

There are many things you can do to help you live your best life longer.

Follow a healthy diet

Your relationship with food changes as you age. Your metabolism slows down, you may lose some ability to taste and smell and your digestive system doesn't always work as well.¹

The following tips may help keep you healthy and happy:

- Eat mostly real foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, poultry and lean meats
- Focus on plant-based foods, which are loaded with phytochemicals and antioxidants to help fight disease
- Drink plenty of water; your healthcare provider can help you determine how much you need
- Leave the table when you're feeling satisfied, not stuffed

Stay physically active

Exercise has many benefits for your body and mind. It helps improve your strength so you can stay independent, boosts your mood and energy levels, improves your balance and prevents falls, reduces stress and anxiety and prevents or delays some diseases.²

A variety of activities is key:

- Aerobic activities keep your heart, lungs and circulatory system healthy
- Strength training makes your muscles stronger
- Flexibility exercises help you stay limber and improve balance

Always talk to your healthcare provider before starting an exercise program. He or she may have specific recommendations or guidelines for you to follow.

Nourish your brain

Keeping your brain active may help prevent cognitive decline and memory problems, so you can stay happy and healthy.³ Try to do the following to maintain the vitality of your brain:

- Keep learning new things
- Adopt a new hobby
- Engage your brain in challenging activities that you enjoy
- Stay socially connected with others—both old friends and new

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Find your purpose

People may lose sight of purpose after retirement. Research shows that purpose reduces the risk of Alzheimer's⁴ and helps preserve physical function.⁵ The following ideas may help you find your purpose:

- Ask yourself: What's important to me? What do I get excited about?
- Find what's important to you. Explore new hobbies, travel opportunities, social groups and spirituality.
- Try volunteering. Volunteers tend to have lower levels of depression, increased life satisfaction and greater well-being than non-volunteers.⁶



Get plenty of sleep

Sleep is a pillar of good health. If you're having sleep problems, try to change your sleep habits.⁷

- Turn off the lights, TVs and computers at least one hour before bedtime
- Keep your room cool, dark and quiet
- Develop pre-bedtime rituals and stick to a consistent schedule
- Talk to your healthcare provider



Take charge of your health

As you age, your relationship with your healthcare team is more important than ever.

- Partner with your doctor to make goals to prevent or manage chronic conditions
- Remember that regular screenings can lead to earlier diagnosis⁸
- Take your medicines exactly as prescribed

Notes

References

¹Help Guide

www.helpguide.org/articles/alzheimers-dementia-aging/staying-healthy-as-you-age.htm

²National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-and-physical-activity-getting-fit-life

³National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov/health/cognitive-health-and-older-adults

⁴Boyle PA, Buchman AS, Barnes LL, and Bennett DA. (2012). Effect of a purpose in life on risk of incident Alzheimer disease and mild cognitive impairment in community-dwelling older persons. *Archives of General Psychology*. 67(3): 304-10.

⁵Kim ES, Kawachi I, Chen Y et al. (2017). Association Between Purpose in Life and Objective Measures of Physical Function in Older Adults. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 74(10): 1039-45.

⁶Jenkinson C, Dickens A, Jones K, Thompson-Coon J, Taylor R, Rogers M, Bambra C, Lang I and Richards S. (2013). Is volunteering a public health intervention? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the health and survival of volunteers. *BMC Public Health*. 13 (1): 773.

⁷Help Guide

www.helpguide.org/articles/sleep/how-to-sleep-better.htm

⁸Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/prevention/screening.htm

This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.

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