



Seniors living healthy.

Five Good Things about Aging

How to use your growing strengths to boost your health.

Concerned about getting older? There might be fewer reasons to fret. Older people do experience changes and losses, such as retiring from a job, bidding old friends goodbye and a decline in some cognitive skills. But the later years also offer some relief from stress. And rates of depression actually go down after age 60, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. If you take the right steps, old age can rank among the best years of your life. Here are five ways you get better with age.

1 Anger, Stress, and Worry are Less Common

People in their 70s and 80s report being less troubled by those negative emotions than people in any other age group, according to a Gallup telephone survey of more than 340,000 people in the U.S. published in the June 1, 2010, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Also, happiness and well-being grow in the later years, says the lead researcher, Arthur Stone, Ph.D., a professor in the department of psychiatry and behavioral science at Stony Brook University in New York and a senior scientist at Gallup.

Why do older people fare as well as they do emotionally? "This is the paradox of aging," says Laura Carstensen, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Stanford University and director of its Center on Longevi-

ty. It may be that as they grow older they don't have to concern themselves with the future as much as younger people do, she explains. And the idea seems to enable them to focus on the here and now. "As people get older, they're more likely to stop and smell the roses," Carstensen says. "We think that has a lot to do with these improvements that we see in emotional health."

What you can do: Try to allow a more positive outlook on life to emerge. Focus on daily activities that are beneficial and that you enjoy. Let go of negative feelings by pursuing activities that foster mindful awareness, such as meditation, yoga, and stretching.



2 Wisdom Grows

There's evidence that people are wiser in their old age. In one study, researchers at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and the University of Texas in Dallas asked 247 subjects age 25 to 93 to pass judgments on the outcomes of fictional reports of political disputes. Then experts blindly graded their answers on six wisdom-related dimensions. They in-

cluded the ability to see other points of view, the likelihood of change, the many ways a conflict might unfold, the uncertainty and the limits of knowledge, and the possibilities for conflict resolution and compromise. A year later 200 of those subjects were re-tested, this time by resolving conflicts described in three authentic letters to the advice columnist Dear Abby. Again, experts blindly graded their judgments.

Significantly more older people ranked in the top 20 percent on wisdom performance, according to a report in the April 20, 2010, issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. And people with an average age of 65 outperformed younger participants.

The brain clings to the experience-based knowledge well into older age, other research suggests. That's one reason wisdom doesn't seem to decline as do some other cognitive capabilities, notably some measures of memory and processing new information.

What you can do: Staying mentally and physically active may help keep mind sharp and protect the brain from atrophy. Pursue some of the attributes of wise individuals, such as being open to new experiences and perspectives, and cultivating social relationships.

3 Marriages gets Healthier

Married seniors report greater satisfaction and more positive experiences with their mates than younger married couples do, even when they quarrel, according to the February 1, 2011 Journal of Social and Personal Relationships. One reason may be that appreciation increases as people grow older and begin to acknowledge their own mortality.

Marital arguments between older people involve less anger. During marital conflicts, senior spouses are more likely to show positive emotions and affec-

tions than middle-aged couples, say researchers at the University of California, Berkeley. When recalling spats, older adults tended to rate their spouses more positively.

Marital harmony in old age is especially important because senior couples tend to enjoy better health and quality of life than their unmarried peers. Happily married seniors report better quality ties with their children, more positive marriages, closer friendships, and an overall greater proportion of positive vs. troubled relationships than middle-aged or young adults, according to the authors of the report. Conversely, recurrent spousal conflict takes a toll on physical and mental well-being, and accumulates overtime to create "persistent irritations, frustrations, and overloads that result in more serious stress reactions, such as anxiety and depression," according to a study in the May 2010 issue of the Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences.

What you can do: Take a cue from happily married seniors: Try to work out conflicts with affection. Express positive rather than negative emotions.

4 Satisfaction with Social Relationships Grows

Seniors typically have a smaller but closer circle of friends than younger adults, research shows. That's because older people tend to focus on close



friends and family members who are important for their emotional bonds.

Social connectedness helps seniors stay healthy. A new study suggests that seniors who volunteer – whether lending a hand to friends and neighbors or doing community work – also reap cognitive health benefits. A three-year study led by researchers at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland looked at the health and the altruistic attitudes and deeds of 1,000 subjects age 72 or older at a Florida retirement community. They found that volunteering was the most consistent predictor of cognitive well-being. And just having altruistic attitudes also contributed to mental health later in life, according to the study, published in the February 2013 issue of the *Journal of Aging and Health*.

What you can do: Maintain social contact by planning your day to include others. Send email to friends and family. Explore recreational and travel opportunities through senior centers. Reach out by being a volunteer, even if it's simply to phone a person in need each day, recommend researchers at the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Aging and Population Health.

5 Happiness Increases

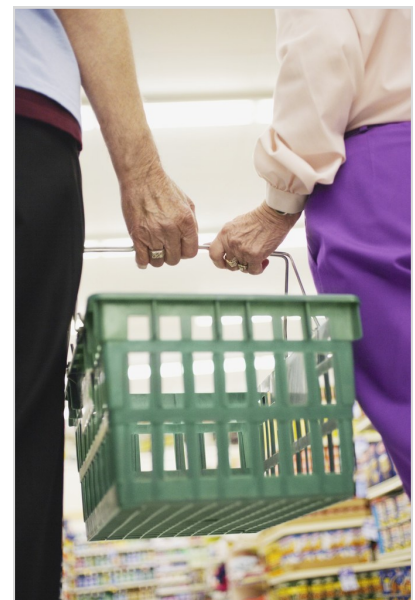
Feelings of emotional well-being may not only improve your quality of life but also add years to it. Researchers at Stanford University and elsewhere followed the emotional health of 184 adults age 18 to 94 for 10 years. During three stages of data collection, the subjects reported their emotional states at five randomly selected times each day for a week. Those who experienced more positive than negative emotions in every day life were more likely to have survived over a 13-year period, according to the report, published in the March 2011 issue of *Psychology and Aging*.

"It's not extreme happiness," Carstensen explains. "People who are happier in day-to-day life experience fewer negative emotions." Aim to be happier or to experience more positive emotions rather than dwelling on negative ones, she says.

That makes sense to Thomas T. Perls, MD, a geriatrician and professor at Boston University who directs the New England Centenarian Study of people 100 years and older. "Being happy and content probably is an important factor for most people in terms of their sense of well-being and even risk for various diseases," he says. "The other issue is whether being unhappy or stressed-out can lead to

unhealthy behavior, whether that's eating a lot of food or smoking and drinking, or other ways that people might impulsively try to deal with a sense of not feeling happy."

What you can do: Develop new interests and indulge in small pleasures. Increased participation in leisure and physical activities may result in more positive emotions and protect your mental well-being.



Contact Us

We would like to hear from you!

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