



Benefit from an Active Lifestyle

There are many things you can do to help yourself age well: exercise and be physically active, make healthy food choices, and don't smoke. But did you know that participating in activities you enjoy may also help support healthy aging?

As people get older, they often find themselves spending more and more time at home alone. The isolation can lead to depression and is not good for your health. If you find yourself spending a lot of time alone, try adding a volunteer or social activity to your routine.

Engaging in social and productive activities you enjoy, like taking an art class or becoming a volunteer in your community or at your place of worship, may help to maintain your well-being.

Research tells us that older people with an active lifestyle:

Are less likely to develop certain diseases. Participating in hobbies and other social and leisure pursuits may lower risk for developing some health problems, including dementia.

Have a longer lifespan. One study showed that older adults who reported taking part in social activities (such as playing games, belonging to social groups, or traveling) or meaningful, productive activities (such as having a paid or unpaid job, or gardening) lived longer than people who did not. Researchers are further exploring this connection.

Are more happy and less depressed. Studies suggest that older adults who participate in what they believe are meaningful activities, like volunteering in their communities, say they feel happier and more healthy. One study placed older adults from an urban community in their neighborhood public elementary schools to tutor children 15 hours a week. Volunteers reported personal satisfaction from the experience. The researchers found it improved the volunteers' cognitive and physical health, as well as the children's school success. They think it might also have long-term benefits, lowering the older adults' risk of developing disability, dependency, and dementia in later life.

Are better prepared to cope with loss. Studies suggest that volunteering can help with stress and depression from the death of a spouse. Among people who experienced a loss, those who took part in volunteer activities felt more positive about their own abilities.

May be able to improve their thinking abilities. Another line of research is exploring how participating in creative arts might help people age well. For example, studies have shown that older adults' memory, comprehension, creativity, and problem-solving abilities improved after an intensive, 4-week acting course. Other studies are providing new information about ways that creative activities like music or dance can help older adults.

Source: Administration for Community Living (<https://oam.acl.gov/>)

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