

Aging Well

How well you age is not only based on your genes, but on your life habits. Over time, exercise, diet, alcohol and tobacco use, activity involvement and attitude can have a larger affect on your aging.

To age well, do these on a regular basis:

Exercise

Regular exercise slows the aging process and can prevent or delay many diseases and disabilities. People of all ages and physical conditions can exercise. Talk to your doctor about ways to increase your physical activity. Start slowly and build up to a more intense activity. Take time to warm up, cool down and stretch. Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity a day. Walk, swim, weight-lift or garden.

Eat a Healthy Diet

Food provides the energy and nutrients your body needs to stay healthy. Choose a variety of healthy foods for your meals and snacks. Pick foods low in fat and cholesterol. Limit foods high in calories and low in nutrients such as chips, cookies, soda and alcohol. Talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian to help you plan a healthy diet.

Learn more about your health care.

Limit Alcohol

Heavy alcohol use can lead to serious health problems such as cancer, pancreatitis, stroke and high blood pressure. Heavy drinkers are also at risk for memory problems and dementia. For people 65 and over, drink no more than one drink a day. One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 1.5 ounces of whiskey or other hard liquor, or 5 ounces of wine.

Stop Smoking and Tobacco Use

Smoking is linked to cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung disease. Smokers are twice as likely to have memory problems such as dementia and Alzheimer's. Smoking can lessen a person's normal life expectancy by 13 to 15 years.

Quitting smoking, even at a late age, has health benefits. Circulation improves right away and the lungs begin to repair themselves. In one year, the risk of cancer and other diseases reduces. Ask your doctor for help to quit. Treatments for older adults need to address their high levels of nicotine dependence and their lifelong dependence on smoking.

Engage in Activities

Engage in activities to keep your mind in shape.

Take part in social activities that help you connect with those around you to make you happier and better able to cope with change. Be productive and help others so you feel needed and valued. Work, volunteer, go to church or see family and friends.

Do mental activities that challenge and stimulate your mind. These can slow the decline of thinking skills you need to drive, cook, clean your home, manage your money and do other tasks. Read, play chess or bridge, do a crossword puzzle or take a class.

Try to learn new skills to create new nerve connections in the brain. Learn to play an instrument or start a new hobby.

Have a Positive Attitude

A positive attitude and the ability to adapt to change in physical and cognitive function will help you stay independent and cope with stress. Focus on what you do well and compensate for the loss of abilities by doing things differently.

It is never too late to adopt healthy life habits to improve your ability to age well.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**