



10 Tips for Aging Well

Simply living longer is not enough. What we really want is to live longer well, staying healthy enough to continue doing the things we love. While having good genes certainly helps, a growing body of research suggests that how well you age depends largely on you and what you do. Fortunately, research also finds that it is never too late to make changes that can help you live a longer and healthier life.

Here, from the American Geriatrics Society's Health in Aging Foundation, are ten tips for living longer and better:

Eat a rainbow

You need fewer calories when you get older, so choose nutrient-rich foods like brightly colored fruits and vegetables. Eat a range of colors— the more varied, the wider the range of nutrients you're likely to get. The longest-lived and healthiest people in the world eat primarily a whole-food, plant-based diet. Vegetables, legumes, fruits, nuts, and seeds form the basis of this diet. Limit red meat, dairy, and other animal products. And choose whole grains over the refined stuff.

Sidestep falls

Walking at least 30 minutes a day, three times a week can help you stay physically fit and mentally sharp, strengthen your bones, lift your spirits— and lower your risk of falls. Aim for about 7,500 steps per day for the most benefits. Aim to bring more activity into your daily routine (such as parking farther away from the store, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator). Preventing falls is important because falls are a leading cause of fractures, other serious injuries, and death among older adults. Bicycling, dancing, and jogging are also good weight-bearing exercises that can help strengthen your bones. In addition to exercising, get plenty of bone-healthy calcium (from food sources) and vitamin D daily.

Toast with a smaller glass

The amount of alcohol that is safe to drink changes as we get older. Adults over age 65 who are healthy and do not take medications should not have more than 3 drinks on a given day or 7 drinks in a week. (A drink is 1.5 oz of hard liquor, 6 oz of wine, or 12 oz of beer.) If you have a health problem or take certain medications, you may need to drink less or not at all. Since alcohol can interact with certain drugs, ask your healthcare professional whether any alcohol is safe for you.

Get your shots

They're not just for kids! Must-have vaccines for older adults include those that protect against pneumonia, tetanus/diphtheria, shingles, and the flu, which kills thousands of older adults in the US every year.

Know the low-down on sleep in later life

Contrary to popular belief, older people don't need less sleep than younger adults. New recommendations from the National Sleep Foundation suggest 7 to 8 hours of shut-eye a night. If you're getting that much and are still sleepy during the day, see your healthcare professional. Sleepiness may be related to your medications or your mood. You may have a sleep disorder called sleep apnea that can increase your risk of developing heart disease.

Flatten your (virtual) opponent, sharpen your mind

Conquering your adversary in a complex computer game, joining a discussion club, learning a new language, and engaging in social give-and-take with other people can all help keep your brain sharp, studies suggest.

Enjoy safer sex

Older adults are having sex more often and enjoying it more, research finds. Unfortunately, more older people are also being diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases. To protect yourself, use a condom and a lubricant every time you have sex until you are in a monogamous relationship with someone whose sexual history you know.

Get your medications checked

When you visit your healthcare professional, bring all of the prescription and over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbs and supplements you take. You can also bring a complete list that notes the names of each, the doses you take, why you take them, and how often you take them. Ask your healthcare provider to review everything you brought or put on your list. Your provider should make sure they're safe for you to take, and that they don't interact in harmful ways. The older you are, and the more medicines you take, the more likely you are to experience medication side effects, even from drugs bought over-the-counter.

Speak up when you feel down or anxious

Roughly 1 in 5 older adults suffers from depression or anxiety. Lingering sadness, tiredness, loss of appetite or pleasure from things you once enjoyed, difficulty sleeping, worry, irritability, and wanting to be alone much of the time can all be signs that you need help. Tell your healthcare professional right away. There are many good treatments for these problems.

Find the right healthcare professional and make the most of your visits

See your healthcare professional regularly, answer questions frankly, ask any questions you have, and follow your provider's advice. If you have multiple, chronic health problems, your best bet may be to see a geriatrics healthcare professional—someone with advanced training in caring for older adults. (The AGS' Health in Aging Foundation can help you find one at <https://www.healthinaging.org/find-geriatrics-healthcare-professional>.)