

March 9: Aging in Place, Keys to Healthy Aging

<https://extension.psu.edu/the-keys-to-healthy-aging>

According to the United States Census Bureau, for the first time in U.S history, older adults ages 65 and older are projected to outnumber children by 2034. It is never too late to focus on improving our personal health and wellness. As we age it's important to develop and maintain a healthy eating plan, participate in regular physical activity, keep minds active, make mental health a priority, stop smoking, and play an active role in your healthcare.

Healthy eating can make a big difference by reducing risk of developing chronic disease like diabetes and heart disease. Providing our body with healthy fuel also benefits brain function. A healthy eating pattern includes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk and dairy products, lean meats and seafood, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

Maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding chronic disease, and maintaining your independence are also benefits from remaining physically active. Older adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity each week while trying to incorporate muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days each week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms). Maintaining muscles helps improve balance and reduce the risk of falls which can increase with age. Always check with your health care provider before beginning any new physical activity routine.

Memory problems and a decline in cognitive skills can be a common part of getting older. Normal memory changes and problems do not typically interfere with everyday life. Help slow cognitive decline by using your mind in challenging ways. As the brain is used in new ways, it begins to form new pathways for connections among brain cells. Incorporating brain stimulating activities like puzzles, games, engaging in ongoing education, learning a new skill or hobby can keep your brain active and improve memory. Social and leisure activities should also be enjoyed to lower risk of mental health problems. When you are involved in activities and personal connections that you find meaningful, they help provide a sense of purpose and increase mental wellbeing.

Be an active part of your healthcare. Take initiative to be sure you schedule necessary screenings, appointments, and exams whether they be routine or specialty based on how you're feeling or symptoms you're experiencing. Make the most out of your appointments by taking a list of questions with you that you wish to ask your physician and know what medications and/or supplements you take. When it comes to your health, try to remember all spectrums including physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual. Start small and pick one area to begin making lifestyle changes and then keep going. Your health and wellbeing will improve over time. It's never too early or too late!