



Successful Aging: Tips for Keeping Your Body and Mind Sharp

Living longer should mean more time to spend with your loved ones, doing things you enjoy, making memories, and cementing your legacy. Not just more time juggling the chronic and progressive ailments of older age.

“One of the greatest challenges facing older adults is preventing physical disability and extending what we call ‘active life expectancy,’” says geriatric specialist [Ami Hall, DO](#).

That is to say spending older age living life to its fullest. They call that successful aging. It’s the difference between getting older (which we all do) and getting [frailer](#) (which we don’t necessarily all do).

Your genetics play a big role in how well you age. But your genes aren’t your destiny. Fortunately, there are steps you can take throughout your life that can help you maintain your physical, mental, and cognitive health as you age. And it’s never too late to start.

Illnesses like [diabetes](#), [congestive heart failure](#), and some forms of [dementia](#) can be delayed or even prevented. Even loss of muscle strength with aging is at least partly preventable. And maintaining a positive outlook can help you stay mentally strong as you face illness and personal losses.

Dr. Hall shared with us advice for successful aging that can help you retain your mobility, independence, and overall well-being longer.

Maintain Your Physical Health

Your physical health is one of the most important factors of successful aging. A healthy body will allow you more opportunities to do the things you enjoy.

“A lot of people look forward to things like traveling, volunteering, or caring for their grandchildren after they retire. Those goals are going to be easier to meet and more enjoyable if your body is physically up to the task,” Dr. Hall notes. “The longer you can keep your body healthy and strong, the longer you can expect to live life on your own terms.”

Dr. Hall recommends these top tips for keeping healthy as you age:

- Avoid cigarette smoking.
- Limit your alcohol consumption to no more than one beverage per day.
- Exercise regularly, being sure to incorporate weight-training, aerobic and balance activities.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits packaged and processed foods and prioritizes plant-based foods, lean protein and healthy fats.
- Maintain a weight that's healthy for you.
- Get enough sleep.
- Practice stress management techniques.
- Get regular medical checkups.
- Play attention to any physical limitations, such as difficulty walking or problems with balance. Seek care before issues severely affect your life.

Keep Your Mind Engaged

An important part of successful aging is keeping your brain active. In fact, the National Institute on Aging explains that keeping your brain engaged in stimulating activities may help compensate for some of the changes that lead to things like dementia and memory loss.

“I like to recommend that people try new hobbies and practice learning new skills throughout their lives,” Dr. Hall says. “In some ways, our brains are much like our muscles—the more you work it, the better your chances of keeping it strong.”

In other words, that whole “can’t-teach-old-dogs-new-tricks” thing? Forget it. Exercising your brain can help prevent cognitive decline and ward off conditions like Alzheimer’s disease.

Try these methods to boost your brain health:

- Participate regularly in hobbies that interest you.
- Try new activities and build new skills. (Maybe try playing a new instrument. Or how about chess?)
- Take part in physically active interests — like dancing, swimming, running or walking. These can keep your body active and can elevate your mood. What's more, physical activity helps increase blood flow and oxygen to your brain to help keep you mentally sharp.

- Keep an active social life and engage regularly with others.
- Try brain-training games to challenge your mind.
- Talk with your provider about how your health conditions or medications may affect your memory or contribute to confusion.

Share Your Wishes and Goals

Working toward a goal requires some planning. And a goal to age successfully is no different.

What do you want your life to look like in your 60s, 70s, and beyond? What do you want to achieve? How do you want to be remembered?

Those are big questions. Some of the biggest ones. And you don't need to have all the exact answers.

But knowing what you want from your life can inform how you care for yourself and how you plan for the future you want.

"Maintaining dignity in older age is important to a lot of people," Dr. Hall explains. "Consider what you want your future to look like and work backward from there. Share your wishes with others. That way you can live with peace of mind knowing that your desires are understood."

For example, if your goal is to [age at home](#), as opposed to an assisted living facility, consider what modifications you'll need to make it safe. Can you move to a first-floor bedroom if you have mobility concerns in the future? Who will help maintain your yard and your home if you're unable to?

No one knows what their future holds. But preparing for the future you want is important to successful aging. You can start now with steps like:

- Considering what you'd like for your future living arrangements. Depending on your desires, that may mean acquiring long-term care insurance or managing investments and assets to cover costs.
- Choosing a caregiver who's knowledgeable in the medical care of older adults, like a geriatrician.
- Communicating your care goals to your family and your healthcare provider.
- Creating an advance directive — a legally binding document that outlines your healthcare wishes if you can't. That may also include naming a [healthcare power of attorney](#) — a person to make decisions on your behalf if needed.

Some people don't like to think about getting older. Others look forward to their older years with gusto—as an opportunity to finally have the future they've worked their whole lives for. Either way, people are living longer than ever before.

And by caring for your health now, you can help make sure your older years are more active. More

independent. And, frankly, more fun.



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