

Aging Well



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

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

Exercise

Regular exercise slows the aging process and can delay or prevent many health problems. Talk to your doctor about your exercise level before starting a new exercise plan. Start slowly and build up to a more intense activity. Take time to warm up, cool down, and stretch. **Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity, five days a week.** The 30 minutes can be broken up into three, 10-minute segments if desired. Walk, swim, lift weights, garden, or play a fitness game on a game console with someone. Choose something you enjoy doing. You are more likely to stick with the exercise if you enjoy it.



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 such as chips, cookies, soda and alcohol that are high in calories and low in nutrients. Talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian to help you plan a healthy diet.

Limit alcohol

Heavy alcohol use can lead to serious health problems, such as cancer, pancreatitis, cirrhosis, stroke, and high blood pressure. Heavy drinkers are also at risk for memory problems and dementia. Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends **no more than two drinks per day for men and no more than one drink per day for women.** One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 1.5 ounces of whiskey or other hard liquor, or 5 ounces of wine. As you age, your doctor may recommend no more than one drink per day.



Stop smoking and tobacco use

Smoking is linked to cancer, heart disease, and lung disease. Smoking reduces the amount of oxygen that gets to the brain, affecting learning and memory.

Smoking can lessen your normal life expectancy by at least 10 years.

Quitting smoking, even at a late age, has health benefits.

Within 20 minutes, your heart rate and blood pressure drop.

Within 3 months, your circulation and lung function improves.

After 1 year, your risk of heart disease is cut in half. ¹

Ask your doctor for help to quit. Treatments for older adults need to address their high levels of lifelong nicotine dependence.



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. Be productive and help others, so you feel needed and valued. Work, volunteer, take part in activities at your place of worship, or see family and friends.

Do mental activities that challenge and stimulate your mind, such as playing chess, card games, crossword puzzles, Sudoku puzzles, or reading. Try to learn new skills to create new nerve connections in the brain. Learn to play an instrument, take a class, or start a new hobby. These activities can help you with related thinking skills you need to drive, cook, clean your home, manage your money, and do other tasks.



Have a positive attitude

A positive attitude and the ability to adapt to change in physical and mental function will help you stay independent and cope with stress. Focus on what you do well. When needed, develop a new plan if some skills or abilities become difficult.

Relaxation exercises, like listening to music, physical exercise, and breathing exercises, can help you to manage stress and cultivate a joyful attitude towards life. Try free guided imagery and mindfulness recordings at <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/integrative-complementary-medicine>.



It is never too late to adopt healthy habits that allow you to age well.

¹BeTobaccoFree.gov: <http://betobaccofree.hhs.gov/gallery/quit-infographic-text.html>. Information in graphic based on 2010 Surgeon General's Report on Tobacco "How tobacco smoke causes disease: The biology and behavioral basis for smoking-attributable disease."