

Healthy Aging: Stay Involved, Be Positive and Know Your Neighbors

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Whether it's listening to an iPod, surfing the web or keeping up with the news, staying involved and in tune with the times may help people live a longer life. That's some of the advice from a poll of older adults who were questioned about the secrets of longevity. Being positive and socializing are additional attributes touted as important factors for a long and healthy life.

Although there is some decline biologically throughout our lifetime, we continue to grow and develop socially, emotionally and intellectually. Helen Kerschner, Executive Director of the Center on Aging at the University of New Mexico, and her colleagues conducted focus groups with people of all ages and asked them what they considered to be the keys to healthy aging. As part of the study they recognized key components that were most often mentioned as important factors for a productive and healthy life. “The study was all about measuring quality of life and trying to understand what are the key drivers for successful aging,” said Dr. Kerschner.

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The key factors were categorized in three broad groups: involvement, positive mental attitude and relationships. Involvement was described as being engaged in daily recreational activities such as volunteerism, ongoing educational pursuits and meaningful leisure activities. Both physical and mental activity was listed as important. Most important was finding meaningful and interesting outlets. If you enjoy a specific type of exercise or a certain intellectual pursuit, you are more likely to continue to stay involved.



Maintaining a positive mental attitude focused on an ability to laugh, being hopeful and looking forward to the future. The key elements mentioned in living a positive life involved a belief that things happen for a reason and a conviction that no matter how good or how bad things may be, they're going to get better. And you can play a role in making them better. Participants in the study stated maintaining a positive mental outlook takes a commitment to form and foster positive habits, and decrease negative ones.

Having mutually beneficial and respectful relationships with family, friends and individuals in the community was also very important. Maintaining social interactions and being able to converse about current events contributes to your overall social wellbeing and was strongly linked to successful aging.

If you are looking to add quality of life to your years, focus on some of the key factors from this study. Keep yourself active and involved with fun and meaningful pursuits, look for the positive in all situations, find time for reflection on the good things in your life and stay in touch with old friends while taking time to make new ones. Following these key lifestyle factors might just add years to your life and more importantly, life to your years.