

## Successful Aging

Successful aging is defined as the ability to maintain the following three goals:

1. Low risk of disease and disease-related disability
2. High mental and physical functioning
3. Active engagement with life

### **Keys to Aging Successfully:**

- Continue to learn
- Get more actively involved
  - Pursue a passion
  - Share yourself
- Build a more hopeful outlook
  - Stop harmful, hopeless thoughts. Few things kill hope more quickly than negative self-talk. Replace negative thoughts with positive one.
  - Celebrate your successes. Refocus your attention from what you consider failures to things that worked out.
  - Talk to yourself. Reinforce what's positive about you — you're healthy, you're strong, you're smart. If you repeat them often enough, they will stick.
- Care for yourself
  - Maintain a positive outlook on life. Don't let things upset you or dwell on negatives. Laugh and have fun.
  - Take good care of your health. Visit your doctor, dentist, and optometrist regularly.
  - Remain active. Find an exercise or walking program that is right for you and stick with it. Get your friends involved too and see how much fun it can be.
  - Stay in close contact with family and friends. Don't wait for people to include you, invite friends to your home or out to lunch.
  - Eat right, including a healthy diet and plenty of fluids.
  - Remain mentally active, never stop learning. Read or take a class. Your local library, college, or senior center may offer these classes at little or no cost.
  - Know what you believe, whether it is in a higher power or in yourself.

## **Build a More Hopeful Outlook**

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## Caring for Yourself

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## Tips for Keeping Your Brain Healthy

1. **Wear your seatbelt.** If driving or as a passenger in a car, truck or airplane wear your seat belt. Motor vehicle accidents are the greatest causes of brain injuries (30-50%).
2. **Wear a helmet!** If biking, skating or on a motorcycle, a helmet will protect you if you fall.
3. **Stay away from unnecessary drugs!** Illegal drug and some legal drugs alter brain function. Some of this is reversible however; some drugs may change brain function permanently. Avoid routine or excessive alcohol intake and never drink and drive.
4. **Know the risks involved with sports!** This applies mostly to boxing, football and martial arts, however, even rock climbing, horseback riding, and skiing have risks. Wear proper safety equipment. Be in good physical condition for your sport. Each year sporting accidents account for about 300,000 concussions.
5. **Look before you leap!** People *have* been known to dive into empty swimming pools! Dive only in deep ends of pools. Know where rocks are located in lakes, ponds, or rivers before diving. About 1,000 spinal cord injuries occur each year in the US from dives into water.
6. **Look both ways before crossing the street!** Pedestrian accidents do happen.
7. **Stay away from guns!** Firearms are responsible for over 38,500 deaths per year. Injuries resulting from firearms are estimated to be 5 fold higher than deaths.
8. **Make sure your home is safe.** This is to help prevent falls and head injuries.
9. **Eat right!** Your brain needs energy to work its best.
10. **Dispose of chemicals properly!** Pesticides & cleaners, contain toxins that can damage/kill nerve cells.
11. **Avoid monotony and strict routine in your daily lives.** This causes mental lethargy and decreases motivation.
12. **Keep a positive attitude about your mind.** Don't focus on why you forget or what you can't remember. Focus on what you do remember and what you can do.

- 13. Give your brain a daily work-out.** Spend 30 minutes a day exercising your brain. Don't do exercises that are frustrating, confusing or cause you stress. Choose ones that challenge you and that you enjoy.
- 14. Avoid playing the same games all the time.** The same brain neuron regions are constantly used and everything else remains unused.
- 15. Herbs and Supplements.** Not one pharmaceutical or herb has been proven to preserve or improve memory. If you think that one does, one must always consider placebo effect. Just *wishing* to improve your memory *will* improve memory by 20 to 30%. Also important is that not everything eaten reaches the brain, which is protected by the "blood brain barrier" which filters the passage of material into the brain.
- 16. Proper diet and water intake.** Keep your weight in moderate ranges, keep cholesterol levels low and drink plenty of waters unless told otherwise by your health care provider.
- 17. Exercise.** Building up cardiovascular endurance with exercise can improve some mental abilities up to 30%. This helps circulate oxygen to the brain. Find an exercise that is right for you. You must enjoy it to stick with it. Do not do exercises that are painful. Swimming, walking or biking is ideal for most.
- 18. Stop smoking.** It is never too late to reap benefits of quitting.
- 19. Get help for depression & anxiety.** High anxiety and depression affects focus and concentration and therefore impair the registration process of memory.
- 20. Stay socially active.** Persons with good social network live longer & are more cognitively fit.
- 21. Relaxation.** Reduce stress through relaxation. Stress affects focus and concentration.
- 22. Recreation.** Stay active with hobbies, leisure interests, volunteering and other things that give you pleasure.
- 23. Medications.** Take medications prescribed for you as directed. Do not take meds prescribed for others. Check with your MD before taking herbal remedies. Limit over-the-counter drugs. Avoid Benadryl or anything with Diphenhydramine such as Tylenol PM.
- 24. If you have diabetes or hypertension.** It is imperative that you follow your doctor's recommendations. Uncontrolled diabetes or hypertension can have a permanent, detrimental effect on your brain.

**25. Actively using memory.** Can be compared to actively using muscles. A muscle not exercised will wither or atrophy. Memory exercises are highly recommended. Use of memory aides (notes, diary or recorder) and improved organization (keeping the keys in one consistent location) can greatly enhance our memory success while reducing the memory workload.

**26. Good communication is vital for remembering.**

- Active listening: Watching and listening play a big part in good communication. The goal is to understand the words and the emotion the person is trying to get across.
- Timing and setting: Some settings make communicating easier, just as certain times seem to be better than others. Be sensitive to potential problems and eliminate distractions.
- Make sure your facing the person you wish to speak to.
- Try to relax and gather your thoughts, if you are angry, anxious or frustrated, it gets more difficult to remember what you want to say.
- Talk about one thing or topic at a time.
- Make certain the person you are speaking with is paying attention to you before you start speaking. (Turn off the television.)
- Jot notes down about what you want to tell someone when you think of it.
- Create and use a hint book.
- Repetition, Repetition, Repetition! It is the easiest way to put information into your memory.

**27. Remembering what is told to you.**

- Only try to remember the important stuff!!!
- Take notes if it is important.
- Sort information by putting information into categories. Group by dates, people, etc.
- Studying new information the same day you heard or read it will improve memory significantly.
- Use humor: Information stays in memory longer if it is related to something interesting. Make up something funny or that ties into what needs to be remembered.
- Color code: Use colored pens, highlighters, or post-it notes.
- Make visual aids: Draw pictures or cartoon characters, graphs, tables, charts, time lines, etc. to aid memory.
- Rehearse aloud: Verbal rehearsal is an effective memory tool.
- Use rhyming and/or singing to help remember phrases.
- Use a tape recorder, such as when going to the doctors.

## Stress Reduction Strategies

### **Mind the basics.**

Eat regular, healthy meals, avoid caffeine, get enough sleep, and try to do some kind of regular physical activity, such as walking, swimming, or biking every day.

### **Take action.**

If something is worrying you, take some kind of action that gives you a sense of control over the situation, even if only in a small way. For example, if you're worrying about relocating, make a list of all the moving-related things you have to do and begin checking them off as you do them.

### **Focus your attention.**

Recognize that there are some things you cannot control, and focus your attention on the things that you can.

### **Relax.**

Use relaxation strategies such as deep breathing, meditating, or visualizing a calm, peaceful space. Read self-help books or trusted Web sites—or consult a therapist—if you need help learning relaxation techniques.

### **Put things into perspective.**

Consider what is most valuable to you, set realistic goals, develop a "roadmap" for achieving them, and take small steps toward your goals.

### **Find balance.**

Try to balance work and leisure. When you're at work, take breaks throughout your day. If possible, go for a walk or get outdoors during your lunch break.

### **Be prepared.**

Prepare ahead of time whenever possible. Rushing to get out of the house or to get to a meeting on time is stressful!

### **Find the opportunities in all situations.**

Changes can be stressful; try to see them positively, as opportunities rather than threats.

### **Develop a sense of humor.**

Develop a sense of humor, and put some fun back into your life by doing something you really enjoy every day.

### **Carve out personal time.**

Carve out personal time—even if it's 15 minutes a day or an hour a week—and devote it to restful, rejuvenating activities that you enjoy.

## Thirty Ways to Exercise 30 Minutes A Day

Getting 30 minutes of exercise a day isn't as difficult as it sounds.

1. Walking
2. Playing tennis
3. Gardening
4. Jazzercise or aerobics
5. Swimming
6. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator
7. Raking leaves
8. Ballroom dancing
9. Wheelchair exercises
10. Walking the dog
11. Sweeping the floor
12. Pushing your grandchild (or a friend's grandchild) in a stroller
13. Water aerobics
14. Bowling
15. Walking between holes instead of riding the golf cart
16. Vacuuming
17. Paddling a boat at a local pond
18. Lifting light weights or soup cans
19. Yoga
20. Parking your car at the far end of the parking lot and walking the distance
21. Playing softball
22. Taking a dance class-ballet, swing, or belly dancing!
23. Window shopping at a brisk pace
24. Pilates
25. Washing and waxing your car
26. Mowing the lawn
27. Visiting a museum and walking through the galleries
28. Stretching
29. T'ai chi
30. Playing the game of horseshoes

## **My Strengths and Interests**

### **Caring for others**

Volunteer in a hospital or nursing home.

### **Cooking**

Set up the coffee hour after your religious service; prepare meals for friends, neighbors, or members of your religious congregation who have just had a baby or are too ill to cook for themselves.

### **Driving**

Volunteer with Meals on Wheels; drive cancer patients to their appointments; deliver flowers to hospitals and shut-ins after religious services.

### **Learning about other cultures**

Become a pen pal and sponsor for a child in another country; organize a UNICEF collection in your community.

### **Reading**

Volunteer to read for the blind or hospital patients; make tape recordings of favorite children's tales for your grandchildren.

### **Woodworking**

Contact a Boy Scout troop to see if you can help boys build their cars for a pinewood derby or boats for a rain gutter regatta.

### **Gardening**

Call a local 4-H group to see if you can teach children how to care for a garden; volunteer to do some yard work around your church or synagogue; organize a farmer's market in your town.

### **Knitting and sewing**

Contact a local Girl Scout troop to ask if you can teach girls to do some needlework. Knit, sew, or crochet items to sell at a fair to raise money for charity.

### **Knowing about history**

Volunteer at a local historical site.

## Grief

### **Stages of Grief**

#### **1. Denial**

A sense of numbness, disbelief, and shock

#### **2. Anger**

At yourself, at your loved one, at surviving family members, at nurses or doctors, or at God

#### **3. Reactive Depression**

Temporary, lasting from several weeks to several months

#### **4. Guilt**

May feel guilty if you laugh or find yourself having fun again

#### **5. Acceptance**

The memory of the person you lost becomes a part of you, and you can go forward enriched for having loved him/her

### **Feelings of Grief**

You may experience:

- Weakness, exhaustion, or physical pain.
- Hollowness or tightness in your stomach, or an upset stomach.
- Loss of appetite or loss of taste.
- Shortness of breath or tightness in your chest and throat.

You may feel:

- That people appear distorted or different.
- Confused.
- Restless.
- Detached from everything around you.
- Like an observer rather than as an active participant in the world.

At night, grief can lead to:

- Sleep troubles.
- Dreams of your loved one.

*Grief is not a sickness to get over; it is a healthy, normal part of loving other people*

## The Grieving Process

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**Grief may make you:**

- Sigh.
- Cry.
- Yell and scream.

**You may want to stay close to your loved one by:**

- Visiting places that remind you of him or her.
- Carrying or treasuring his or her belongings. Some people find it soothing to wear jewelry or clothing that belonged to their loved one.
- Searching for or calling out for him or her.

**Last, don't be surprised if you:**

- Imagine that you see or hear your loved one.
- Avoid social gatherings.

## Caring for Yourself While Grieving

### **Take care of your body:**

- Eat as well as you can. Treat yourself to dinner with a friend.
- Exercise when you can. Taking a walk about six hours before you go to bed may help you to sleep better.
- Pamper yourself. Take a hot bath, get a manicure or a pedicure, bask in the sun, or get a hot fudge sundae. Do whatever comforts you in your sadness.
- Rest. Avoid drinks that have caffeine--like coffee, tea, and colas--in the evening.

### **Take care of your mind:**

- Do things that you enjoy. Go to a movie, listen to music, or visit a museum.
- Don't expect too much of yourself. Just do what you can.
- Take comfort in thoughts of the person you have lost.

### **Take care of your spirit:**

- Allow yourself to cry.
- Lean on your friends and family. They want to help you. Tell them when you'd like their company.
- Don't feel obligated to people who are offering condolences. Don't be afraid to ask for some time alone.

## Myths about Grief

- All losses are the same.
- It takes two months to get over your grief.
- Grief always declines over time in a steady decreasing way.
- When grief is resolved it never comes up again.
- Family members always help grievers.
- Feeling sorry for yourself is not allowable, and it's better to put painful things out of your mind.
- You only need to express your feelings and this will resolve grief.
- You should not talk about the loss because you may make the bereaved feel worse.
- Being upset and grieving means that you do not believe in God or trust your faith.
- The intensity and length of your grief are testimony to the importance of the loss.
- If someone has lost a spouse, he or she knows what it is like to lose a child.
- It is not important to have social support in your grief.
- If someone in grief expresses a strong desire to kill him or herself, you don't need to pay attention.

Source: American Society on Aging  
Live Well, Live Long: Steps to Better Health Series, 2006  
<http://www.asaging.org/cdc/module5/phase6/index.cfm>

## How to Help a Grieving Person

### **Listening**

Listening to grieving people is the most important thing you can do. Listen in a non-judging way, and allow them to tell the story or stories over and over if they need to. Repetition is often a key part of the healing process.

### **Sharing**

Share your memories of the loved one, too. Reflect on the feelings they are experiencing--but as you share, be careful not to start one-upping their feelings, or comparing your loss to theirs. And don't say "I know exactly how you feel." It's usually much more helpful to say something along the lines of "I can't imagine what you must be feeling right now," because most grieving people feel like no one else could know what they're experiencing.

It's also important not to tell people that time heals all wounds, or that their loved one is in a better place. While that may be true (depending on your belief system--and theirs) they're not in a place to hear that at this point.

### **Timing**

Each person recovers from grief at his or her own pace. Some can recover quickly; while others can take a full year or more (this will also depend on the severity of the loss). Be careful not to impose a time limit or tell people to get over it and move on--feeling that they've grieved too long can cause people to suppress their feelings, and slow or stop the healing process.

Understand that grieving people are very likely to have emotional setbacks, even after a long period of healing and outward "improvement." Something could spark a memory that causes them to spiral downwards--dates that were important in the loved one's life, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays, are often triggers for setbacks.

Be there for the grieving person as long as (s)he needs you.

### **Be Tolerant**

Remember that there's no definitive way to experience grieving, and that everyone experiences a unique set of feelings or physical symptoms. Understand that the grieving person will always feel the loss, but that he or she will learn to live with it over time.

### **Celebrate**

It may sound strange to talk about celebrating, but it can help grieving people heal. Help them celebrate the life of the loved one they've lost. Help them develop rituals they need to get through the difficult early stages of the grieving process.

### **Be Watchful**

Sometimes grieving people can go to extremes--if you notice signs of suicidal behavior or fear they may harm themselves or others, it's your moral, legal, and ethical duty to refer them to a mental health professional.

Source: <http://www.funeralplan.com/griefsupport/help.html>

## Helping a Grieving Person: Things Not to Do

While there are many things you can do to help people through the pain of their grief, there are also things that don't help at all--and that could even be hurtful. Here are some thoughts on things its best not to do.

- Don't try to "fix" things, or make it all better for the person suffering the loss--no one can ever do that.
- Don't use clichés, or tell people that time heal all wounds. The wound of loss will never really heal, but they will learn to live with the loss over time.
- Don't compare one griever's loss or experience of grief to another's. Comparisons seem to minimize the loss or to force grievers to behave the "right way" instead of the way they are reacting--and this can retard the healing process.
- Don't encourage grieving people to make major changes, such as moving, changing jobs, etc. Extreme grief clouds judgment and the people may later regret their decision.
- Don't attempt to cheer them up--just be there for them, and be as supportive as you can.
- Don't scold; give advice, lecture, etc. Let the grief run its course--and remember that everyone heals at a different pace.
- Don't suggest the person can replace the one they've lost ("You can have another baby," or "you'll find someone else"). This can be alienating and excruciating for grieving people to hear--it seems to minimize their loss, even though that's not your intent.

Source: <http://www.funeralplan.com/griefsupport/dont.html>