

## HOW DO WE STAY INDEPENDENT AS WE AGE?

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My grandmother always told me that “aging isn’t for sissies”. She certainly nailed that one, among many other wise observations.

We are not immortal. We will (hopefully) age and age well, and we will pass from this life. There are a lot of factors to consider about our aging bodies.

Our bodies show the wear and tear of years and activities gone by. Our bodies show the wear and tear of just living!

Our *hearts* beat continuously, about 70 times a minute pumping about 1 gallon of blood delivering oxygen and nutrients to our tissues and organs. Most of us are born with two *kidneys* that continuously help remove waste and excess fluid from our bodies, filter the blood, help make red blood cells, help maintain blood pressure, and balance vitamins and minerals. Then there are our *lungs* which continuously bring oxygen to our blood and remove carbon dioxide from our bodies. And then there is the *brain*. The brain that never shuts down, continuously acting as our body’s command center regulating essential functions, processing sensory input, automatic processes (heart rate/breathing), and so very much more. What is the common word? Continuously. Never stopping until we stop.

Then, just to provoke more thoughts about “How Do We Stay Independent as We Age?” let’s consider what environment and genetics do to our aging process. Did you work in an environment that put stress on your body? Were you exposed to chemicals? What was the air like in your neighborhood? Was your work physically challenging? What is your family medical history – diabetes, high blood pressure? What has your life style been – tobacco use, substance use, diet, exercise, stress management? So much to consider!

How can we positively impact our aging process? How can we *live* as long as we’re alive?

A few basics:

\*We can’t go back and undo the damage that may have occurred but we can look at what we can do from this day forward.

\*If we “fall off the wellness wagon”, we get back on and resume working on being our best selves.

\*We don’t have to do it all at once. Start slow and add wellness activities and lifestyle modifications in ways that will be encouraging to you and make you want to continue.

\*Give yourself time to develop new habits that are healthy.

\*We don’t have to give up everything we enjoy, but we have to be cognizant of the effects on our well-being. (Keep any existing health issues in mind when developing your health plan.)

\*We need to be aware of our current health issues. What can you do to mitigate the impacts of these concerns?

## *DAILY HEALTH*

### Generally

- \*If you use tobacco products, stop
- \*Watch alcohol consumption

### Diet

- \*Researchers tell us that the Mediterranean diet which emphasizes vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, and extra virgin olive oil is most healthy. This diet includes moderate fish, poultry, and dairy, and limits red meat, processed foods, and added sugars. [Source: Mayo Clinic]
- \*Stay hydrated.
- \*Watch caffeine and sugar intake.

### Exercise

- \*Check with the physician for any restrictions.
- \*Take walks, do Tai Chi, try Yoga

### Medical Check-Ups

- \*Keep up with routine check-ups, labs, preventive care (colonoscopies, mammograms, etc)
- \*Include vision and hearing screens

## *ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY*

Is your home aging-friendly? Can you modify your home to make it safer?

### Floor Space

- \*Rugs can be a fall hazard. Remove them.
- \*Are their kids in the home? Keep floors clear of toys.
- \*Are their pets in the home? Pets are a fall hazard. Be aware of where your pets are. Keep the floors clear of toys.

### Bathroom

\*The bathroom is a site of many falls. Install grab bars by the commode and in the shower. Shower benches are another safety feature.

### Lighting

\*Make sure rooms and stairways are well-lit. Vision changes as we age necessitating better lighting.

### Neighborhood

\*Is the neighborhood safe?

### Outside and yard

- \*Is the walkway well-lit?
- \*Is the walkway in good shape or are there fall / trip hazards?
- \*Is the yard manageable? Can the grass be maintained?

## *EMOTIONAL SECURITY*

- \*What is the support system? Family? Neighbors? Church? Friends?
- \*Is isolation a factor?
- \*Are there opportunities for socialization and is it accessible?
- \*Take time for yourself
- \*Pay attention to self-care

*SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING*

\*Pray, meditate

\*Do what gives you peace

\*Where do you find your moments of joy?

\*What makes your life worthwhile?

Consider resilience. What gives you the strength to face adversity? What have been successful coping mechanisms for you? You have tools that have served you in the past. What are they?

There are many things to consider when thinking about being as independent as possible for as long as possible. We need to take care of ourselves. It just takes a little more effort as we age!