

9 Ways to Age Gracefully

Individuals who age ' gracefully are able to find a balance between the inevitability that every day brings them one day closer to death and the value of doing whatever they can to remain healthy and vital as long as they can. Although mortality is a fact of life, so is the fact that many of the perceived age-related problems are likely the consequence of a lifetime of poor lifestyle habits and can be prevented.

1. **CONVENTIONAL NONSENSE.** Too many older adults believe that aches and pains are a normal part of growing older. They're not. Although a certain amount of wear and tear on the body does occur, more often than not, they're the upshot of disuse. Stiff joints and other body aches are not typical by-products of the aging process. Such conditions can be avoided if the individual simply takes care of themselves by putting their bodies through a full range of motion on a regular basis.
2. **A SENSE OF WELL-BEING.** Emotional vitality can play a critical role in the ability to age gracefully. All factors considered, individuals who feel good about themselves, as well as connected to others, tend to experience more physically enriched lives. Another way for individuals to enhance their emotional health is to be socially active, for example, interact with friends and family, volunteer in the community, and so on.
3. **STIMULATE THE BRAIN.** Being cognitively active in old age has been found to help protect or improve a person's mental sharpness. Research also has shown that engaging in mentally stimulating activities substantially reduces the likelihood that an individual will develop either dementia or Alzheimer's disease. The key for individuals, in this regard, is to challenge their intellect every day (e.g., read, do a crossword puzzle, etc.)
4. **SHUT-EYE MATTERS.** In reality, the sleep needs of individuals don't change as they age. All adults, including older adults, require between 7 and 9 hours daily. Older adults do undergo a number of changes (e.g., their bodies secrete less of two critical sleep hormones) that can impact the quality of sleep. Older adults can help ensure that they get sufficient rest by exercising daily, spending time outdoors, and reducing the intake of alcohol and caffeine.
5. **SMART CHOICES.** It can be argued that, for a number of health-related reasons, the need to make sound decisions concerning what and how much to eat does not diminish as people age. In reality, excess body fat (a condition that many older adults experience) can have a significant impact on whether an individual is predisposed to certain diseases, particularly, coronary heart disease. As such, a systematic plan for aging gracefully should encompass eating a healthy diet that includes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and an appropriate amount of healthy fats.
6. **A STRONG RESOLVE.** Considerable research indicates that as people age, most individuals begin to lose muscle mass and function. This age-related reduction, also known as sarcopenia, occurs in both people who are inactive and individuals who are physically active, although it is much more pronounced in people who are physically inactive. The key point, however, is that older adults can slow down and, in some cases, preclude such a decline in their level of muscular fitness by engaging in a strength training regimen on a regular basis.

7. **A SENSE OF PURPOSE.** From head to toe, every part of the human body tends to be affected by the aging process. To one degree or another, most older adults experience these age-related changes, particularly as they impact the five human senses — hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch. The key is to not ignore the natural changes that aging brings. Rather, older adults need to be aware of these changes (when/if they occur) and to be proactive in mitigating their possible impact.
8. **ATTITUDE, ATTITUDE, ATTITUDE.** Growing older can be rife with emotional land mines. The best way to deal with such obstacles is to have a positive attitude about life, about aging, about everything else. In fact, having a positive outlook can have a desirable impact on several health-related factors, not the least of which is a lower level of stress, as well as a longer life expectancy.
9. **PEACE OF MIND.** All factors considered, the dictates of the "Serenity Prayer" are the guideposts for aging gracefully: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference." Embracing this precept can be a viable pathway for life becoming even better for people as they age.