

TOP TEN TIPS ON AGING WELL

By Marc Agronin, MD

One point I make in my book *How We Age: A Doctor's Journey into the Heart of Growing Old* (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2011) is that there is no magic cure for aging – no pills, potions, or fountain-of-youth strategies that will restore our youth. But this fact does not mean that there isn't a lot we do, regardless of age, to improve both mental and physical well-being as we age and best capture all of the advantages of growing older. The following ten tips are all based on the latest research into aging, and are accessible and affordable for everyone:

1. Exercise Your Body

Moderate exercise, such as walking for 30 minutes 3 times a week, not only improves blood flow to your brain but is associated with a significantly reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease.

2. Exercise Your Brain

Because several of our mental skills slow down with age, keeping mentally active is critical to maintaining and sharpening them. Just as you would work out different parts of your body in different ways to keep fit, the key is to *cross-train* your brain. Start up a new interest or hobby. Take a course on something you've never studied before. Listen to a different type of music.

3. Fruits, Veggies, Fish

Forget about expensive supplements that come with grandiose claims but little data to support them. To best enhance overall health and reduce the risk of many diseases, eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and a good source of omega-3 fatty acids (fish, flaxseed and walnuts).

4. Relationships Count Most

According to the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the relationships we have in our lives have a more important impact on aging well than the events we experience. It is important to maintain and cultivate our relationships with others, especially with younger generations. Keeping socially active has even been found to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

5. Memory is More Than Words

We all worry about memory lapses as we age, but these occur normally in everyone and are not always a warning sign of a disorder. But memory is not simply a matter of remembering a word or a name, but involves recalling sights, sounds, smells, emotions, and movements. If one form of memory slows, other types can shore it up. And all types of mental exercises can help memory.

6. Know What Hurts

Very simply, to protect your brain you need to control blood sugar and lipid levels, treat high blood pressure, minimize risk of head injury, and avoid tobacco products and excess alcohol.

7. Be Wise

As you age you have more knowledge and experience than ever before. Wisdom is the ability to approach experience with a broader, more tolerant, and practical perspective. It gives us an intuitive sense for decision making. And wisdom has the potential to grow with age.

8. Count Your Blessings

Just as you have a portfolio to keep track of your financial assets, consider making a similar list of your personal interests. What do you enjoy doing? How might things change as you age? How can you adapt? Avoid being too narrow in your interests and activities.

9. Be Creative

Creativity has a way of increasing as we age. Many of the great folk artists are in the 80's and 90's. It's never too late to take up writing, painting, sculpting and other creative arts.

10. Don't Worry, Be Happy

According to a major Gallup poll of people age 18 to 85, levels of stress and worry hit a low point and well-being hits a high point by age 85. As we age we tend to become more selective but practical, more accepting and positive, and less depressed – contrary to what many people think. And humor is one of our best defenses!

To learn more about these important tips on aging, read *How We Age: A Doctor's Journey into the Heart of Growing Old* by Marc Agronin, MD at www.marcagronin.com