

With life expectancies at an all time high, Americans are living longer than ever before and the older population in the United States is growing fast. Today there are nearly 40 million Americans 65 years or older. That number is expected to grow to more than 72 million people by 2030.

Getting older is a normal, natural part of life. As you age, you can expect your body to undergo gradual changes. The way your body ages depends on a variety of factors, such as genetics, environment and lifestyle choices. While you cannot change your genetic makeup, you can control the choices you make. Making healthy lifestyle choices may help slow the aging process and it's never too late or too early to begin working on them. September is Healthy Aging Month, so it's a great time to learn what you can do to stay healthy as you age.

## **Eat Well, Age Well**

Good nutrition is important during every stage of life, and as you age, it becomes even more significant. Eating a low-salt, low-fat diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains may help reduce your risk of developing a number of chronic conditions associated with aging, including diabetes, heart disease, cancer and stroke. In addition, eating well helps your bones and immune system remain strong and gives you more energy. Following a healthy diet can set you on the road to leading a long, healthy and comfortable life.

## **Exercise for Healthy Aging**

We all know that exercise is good for your health. As you get older, staying active becomes even more important. As people age they tend to lose some of their flexibility, strength, balance and endurance. While some of this is due to the natural process of aging, a portion can also be attributed to being less physically active in general.



In fact, studies indicate that engaging in regular exercise can reduce, and in some cases prevent, many of these functional declines related to aging. Additionally, regular exercise and staying physically active can help prevent, delay or improve many chronic conditions which tend to become more common as we age. These include heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol. Growing older doesn't mean you have to lose your abilities and rely on others to help you with everyday tasks. Take charge, exercise!

## **Keeping Mentally Fit as You Age**

As you age, it is normal to expect changes to your body and mind. You may not be able to remember recent events or recall details as well as you did in your 30s; however, there are many things that you can do to keep your brain sharp and working well throughout your life.

You have probably heard the phrase "use it or lose it." Many people use this phrase when referring to exercising the muscles in the body. You exercise to keep your body in shape, and you must also exercise your mind in order to stay mentally fit. Engaging in mentally stimulating activities daily can help maintain your brain function as you age. Such activities include:

- Reading and writing
- Solving puzzles, such as a crossword or jigsaw puzzle
- Sudoku, Kenken and other math or logic puzzles
- Playing board or card games
- Attending a lecture/discussion group
- Learning a new craft or skill, like how to play a musical instrument
- Learning a new language

In addition to engaging in stimulating activities, there are other ways to help stay mentally fit. In fact, many of the things you do to keep your body healthy can also keep your mind healthy, including: getting regular exercise, getting enough sleep, reducing stress and being sociable.