Aging Well

How well you age is not only based on your genes, but also your life habits. Over time, exercise, diet, alcohol and tobacco use, activity and attitude can have an impact on aging.

Exercise

Regular exercise slows the aging process and can delay or prevent many health problems. **Talk to your doctor about your exercise level before starting a new exercise plan.** Start slowly and build up to a more intense activity. Take time to warm up, cool down and stretch. Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity a day. The 30 minutes can be broken up into three 10 minute segments if desired. Walk, swim, lift weights, garden, or play a fitness game on a game console with someone. Choose something you enjoy doing. You are more likely to stick with the exercise if you enjoy it.

Eat a Healthy Diet

Food provides the energy and nutrients your body needs to stay healthy. Choose a variety of healthy foods for your meals and snacks. Pick foods low in fat and cholesterol. Limit foods such as chips, cookies, soda and alcohol that are high in calories and low in nutrients. **Talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian to help you plan a healthy diet.**

Limit Alcohol

Heavy alcohol use can lead to serious health problems such as cancer, pancreatitis, cirrhosis, stroke and high blood pressure. Heavy drinkers are also at risk for memory problems and dementia. The 2010 Dietary Guideline for Americans recommends no more than 2 drinks per day for men and no more than one drink per day for women. One drink equals 12...
ounces of beer, 1.5 ounces of whiskey or other hard liquor, or 5 ounces of wine. As you age, your doctor may recommend no more than one drink per day.

**Stop Smoking and Tobacco Use**

Smoking is linked to cancer, heart disease and lung disease. Smokers are twice as likely to have memory problems such as dementia and Alzheimer’s. Smoking can lessen a person’s normal life expectancy by 13 to 15 years.

Quitting smoking, even at a late age, has health benefits. Circulation improves right away and the lungs begin to repair themselves. In one year, the risk of cancer and other diseases reduces. Ask your doctor for help to quit. Treatments for older adults need to address their high levels of lifelong nicotine dependence.

**Engage in Activities**

Engage in activities to keep your mind in shape.

Take part in social activities that help you connect with those around you. Be productive and help others, so you feel needed and valued. Work, volunteer, go to church or see family and friends.

Do mental activities that challenge and stimulate your mind, such as playing chess, card games, crossword puzzles, Sudoku puzzles or reading. Try to learn new skills to create new nerve connections in the brain. Learn to play an instrument, take a class or start a new hobby. These activities can help you with related thinking skills you need to drive, cook, clean your home, manage your money and do other tasks.

**Have a Positive Attitude**

A positive attitude and the ability to adapt to change in physical and mental function will help you stay independent and cope with stress. Focus on what you do well. When needed, develop a new plan if some skills or abilities become difficult.

It is never too late to adopt healthy habits that allow you to age well.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.