There is a growing body of research exploring the relationship between aging and creativity. Creativity influences your mind and body. It fosters communication and expression that is both healing and embraces the wholeness inherent in each of us. Creative activities provide you with opportunities to heal and continue to grow.
Creative Expression and Aging

The arts stir us in countless ways. They affect your emotions. They can be a conduit for looking within. They can help you communicate with others to express your hopes, fears or grief. Even the seemingly simple act of coloring in an adult coloring book can help release tension and anxiety.

Creative outlets offer opportunities for you to build the resilience and ability to adapt to changes you will experience as you grow older. By incorporating creativity into your life as you age, you can gain a sense of control over how your body and mind are changing.

Using your creative skills can provide an opportunity to do something that can benefit others such as knitting a hat for a newborn or building a birdhouse. This can help you look toward your future with meaning and purpose.

Creativity and Cognitive Health

Research on creativity and aging demonstrates the positive impact of the arts on health and illness, including using creativity to work your mind. Creativity promotes brain plasticity, so art is your natural ally as you grow older. When your brain is challenged through your activities and your surroundings, the formation of new synapses (contact points) occurs. So engaging in new experiences, like art, can enhance your brain connections.

You can protect and enhance your brain by exploring your creative potential. The best arts that promote brain health are those involving physical activity and movement, as well as mental challenge and stimulation. Challenging creative activities that require you to acquire and refine new skills also create a stimulating environment for your brain. When combined with social interaction you have a potent recipe for healthy aging.

Cognitive research shows we maintain our capacity for creative expression as we age. Even if memory is diminishing, the capacity for imagination is still there. Creativity can provide a valuable means of communication and connection between those with mild cognitive impairment or dementia and their loved ones.

Enhancing Your Quality of Life

Nearly all of us will be managing at least one chronic medical condition after the age of 65. Reducing stress in your daily life is a vital part of your self-care plan as you age because research suggests stress can lead to symptom flare-ups for many chronic conditions.

Having creative outlets are a must for your stress-reduction plan. Writing in a journal, painting, making pottery or doing needlework may reduce your stress. Taking a salsa dancing class may help you unwind and connect with your physical being.

Creative expression also provides a pathway to stay connected to yourself as a person who has meaning and value, even if you may be walking a little slower. As you consider what makes you happy, you can focus on finding ways to maintain a strong connection to doing what you love and maintaining your sense of self. You may have to adapt a little, but staying connected to what defines you as a person is a vital healthy aging strategy! Exploring your creativity provides the pathway.

Final Thoughts

Engaging in a mindful, creative and reflective process can increase your self-awareness and self-understanding. You can set an intention to focus on what you need from your creative efforts, such as healing, strength, gratitude or peace. As you explore creativity, you will create many significant opportunities for social engagement and connection with others, and with yourself.
Take Action Now

• **Create Something.** If you enjoy knitting, crafts or woodworking, use your skills. If you need help, take a class in art or another new skill through Community Education, the Rochester Art Center or other local arts organization.

• **Write Something.** Start with a journal to record actions and ideas. Write a short autobiography. Write short essays about impactful periods of your life or treasured memories. Share your writing with family members.

• **Discover Local Art.** Visit the art exhibits in the Parkside Gallery at Charter House or the Rochester Art Center or take the tour of the Mayo Clinic Art Collection.

• **Spend Time in Nature.** Take a walk in a local park or on bike trails along the Zumbro River. Enjoy the birds, flowers and natural rhythms of life.

• **Learn a Musical Instrument.** Not only is learning how to play a musical instrument fun, but it is a culturally enriching thing to do. If you already know how to play an instrument, learn a different one.

**GOAL:** Identify one or more creative activities you enjoy and practice them regularly.

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**Expert Insight**

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“The key to aging well is to remain interested in life and stay connected to the world around you. One of the most powerful opportunities for connection comes from how we experience the arts. You can feel connected to others by reading a poem or attending an opera performance. Experiencing the arts has the added benefit of stimulating your brain centers and impacting your cognitive functioning. When you are moved by a performance, your limbic system is stimulated. Your temporal lobe is engaged when listening or watching a performance that arouses your emotions. When you explore the visual arts, you process what you see through many different parts of your brain. When you dance, your motor cortex is stimulated. Each experience in appreciating or participating in a wide range of the arts can improve your attention and concentration. Enjoying a rich tapestry of any kind of artist endeavor connects you with your own humanity.”
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