Healthy aging requires more than just focusing on enhancing your physical fitness and proper nutrition. Those who truly thrive as older adults understand staying connected to the world around you is vital for healthy aging. Being socially connected enhances your quality of life by providing avenues for meaning and purpose.
Social Isolation

For many, growing older means a shrinking world. Our family and friends may move to other geographic locations. They may withdraw from us due to struggles with health issues, or they may pass away. When this happens to you it can be exhausting to consider how to build new relationships. Yet it is a necessity because sustaining a social connection with others is vital to your healthy aging strategy.

There is a tendency towards inactivity and social isolation as we age, which can create the potential for depression to set in. This can be debilitating and minimize your quality of life. Since being connected to others helps alleviate the symptoms, incorporating opportunities for socialization into your daily life is an essential approach to maintaining your mental health.

Connections with others can help you cope with the health changes you experience as you grow older. They can also be a source of support as you become a caregiver when the health of a loved one changes. Connections with others can help you successfully navigate the complex transitions associated with aging.

Reinforce Healthy Lifestyles

The connection between healthy aging and friendship extends beyond the emotional support it offers. A sense of connection can also be a powerful buffer when you are facing a major life change, learning to deal with a chronic condition, or facing a difficult medical diagnosis.

The old adage “Show me who your friends are and I’ll tell you who you are” speaks to the truth of healthy aging too. If you are socially isolated, it impacts who you are. You can fall into unhealthy lifestyle habits such as eating food that is not nutritious or engaging in excessive drinking.

Spending time with friends and family can inspire you to adopt a healthy routine. They can reinforce your engagement in fitness activities by going to an exercise class with you or become your walking partner. Being socially connected can strengthen your focus on eating well. Laughing with others can be a stress reliever and help you focus on the positive things you have in your life.

Powerful Cognitive Connections

Social contact offers benefits to help you maintain your cognitive function. Joining in social activities stimulates your mind and keeps your brain busy. Learning provides both stimulating activity and significant opportunities for social engagement.

Conversation and connection challenge your brain too. When your brain is challenged through your activities and your surroundings, the formation of new synapses (contact points) occurs. Participating in new social experiences with others can be a potent approach to enhancing your brain connections. This can be especially powerful if it is ongoing and requires a learning effort from you.

Better yet, study and speak a new language. Carrying on a conversation in another language can be an exceptionally stimulating cognitive exercise for you and your language partner. Conjugating new words and carrying on simple conversations builds new neuronal pathways and strengthens your cognitive capacity. Moreover, learning a new language offers you a fun way to connect with other people.

Final Thoughts

While your relationships will change as you grow older, think of new relationships as an evolution of your life connections, not as a replacement for those you have lost. Maintaining deep interpersonal connections and participating in social support groups will connect you to others and to yourself. Having a real sense of connection will allow you to age with vitality and meaning.
Many people approach aging as if it is a battle to be fought. Those with the best chance of winning this battle are those who remain engaged with others. Some withdraw from the world as they undergo the transitions of aging. Social isolation leads to loneliness. It is also a detriment to your brain health as the lack of brain stimulation occurs when you are detached from the world around you. Solitary activities are not stimulating enough to maintain your cognitive health. Connecting with other people provides you with many opportunities to stimulate your brain through conversation and learning and having a sense of purpose. Share meals, play cards, volunteer or do crafts with others. Enjoy time with your grandchildren or travel to a place you have always wanted to visit. Get rid of the stereotypes associated with aging. You can still remain active, have a sense of purpose and enjoy life even if you are moving a little slower. Keep looking for ways to engage in life long learning, expand your curiosity and discover more about the world around you, and finally, find happiness and purpose by joining others in helping those in need.

Expert Insight

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Many people approach aging as if it is a battle to be fought. Those with the best chance of winning this battle are those who remain engaged with others. Some withdraw from the world as they undergo the transitions of aging. Social isolation leads to loneliness. It is also a detriment to your brain health as the lack of brain stimulation occurs when you are detached from the world around you. Solitary activities are not stimulating enough to maintain your cognitive health. Connecting with other people provides you with many opportunities to stimulate your brain through conversation and learning and having a sense of purpose. Share meals, play cards, volunteer or do crafts with others. Enjoy time with your grandchildren or travel to a place you have always wanted to visit. Get rid of the stereotypes associated with aging. You can still remain active, have a sense of purpose and enjoy life even if you are moving a little slower. Keep looking for ways to engage in life long learning, expand your curiosity and discover more about the world around you, and finally, find happiness and purpose by joining others in helping those in need.
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