People today are taking a more proactive approach to managing how their health evolves as they age. This is significant as there is a growing body of evidence on how lifestyle impacts our health over the long term. Much of the deterioration associated with aging can actually be attributed to living a sedentary lifestyle rather than aging itself. Research shows physical activity and exercise is "preventive medicine" as they can prevent or reduce many age-related issues.
Exercise and Physical Activity

Most people think of planned exercise as their sole focus for their fitness regimen. The word “exercise” is often thought of as working out in a gym or taking a formal class. Others focus on walking 10,000 steps per day. Yet physical activity does not have to be limited to such a narrow perspective.

Any physical activity that gets you off the couch and moving is important to improving your health. This type of activity has a clever acronym: NEAT. This term was coined at Mayo Clinic, and stands for non-exercise activity thermogenesis (NEAT). This includes activities like housecleaning, gardening and washing your car.

Moving more can have a positive health impact. It reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. It strengthens bones and muscles. For those living with arthritis, movement can decrease your pain, improve your range of motion, and increase your endurance. Even doing a little gentle exercise in the evening can help you feel less stiff in the morning.

By broadening our view to focus on moving more, we can make physical activity even more accessible and a continuing part of our lives as we grow older. The bottom line is all kinds of activity are important to your health.

Cognitive Impact of Physical Activity

Regular physical activity can positively impact our cognitive abilities too. Physically active people are less likely to experience a decline in their mental function and have a lowered risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease. Exercise during middle age and in the early senior years can result in less progression of memory loss in later life.

The psychological and mental health benefits of exercise and physical activity can impact mood states, help alleviate depression symptoms, and often results in less medication for those suffering from these imbalances. It can help keep anxiety and depression from coming back, acts as a stress reliever, and is good for chronic pain management because the release of endorphins is 10 times more powerful than morphine.

The impact on your brain of moving more can truly enhance the long-term quality of your life. So don’t wait any longer!

Rethinking Your Approach to Fitness

The basics of a sound fitness program don’t change as we age. The four main components of a fitness plan for older adults should incorporate strength training, aerobic exercise, balance training and flexibility. Intentionally focus on including each of these key elements into your fitness plan to increase the potential to age optimally. Have you covered it all?

If you are just getting started, focus your efforts first on engaging in enjoyable activities that get you moving. As you incorporate physical activity into your daily life, you will begin to see positive results. Then, consider expanding your activities or participating in fitness programs such as those offered at DAHLC or Charter House to ensure you are covering all your bases.

Final Thoughts

Developing a mindset that incorporates physical activity and exercise into your everyday life is important to help you stay physically and mentally fit. It is a long-term investment in your future quality of life. This effort is one investment you can control that will give you a great return. It is the foundation of the Fountain of Youth!
There is no magic bullet to healthy aging, but research shows there is a multi-factorial process impacting how well you will age. Evaluating your lifestyle is an important consideration in your healthy aging plan. One critical element to evaluate in your lifestyle is your activity level. Physical activity increases your chances of living well. When combined with a good diet, you will do even better as you age. Engaging in physical activity improves your brain function for memory and executive function. It is important to sit less and move more. You need to do more than just walk 10 minutes. Even if you have orthopedic conditions or other medical challenges, you can find opportunities to add movement into your day. Ideally you should move about at least once an hour. If you ever needed a reason to increase your level of physical activity, here it is: those who engage in a lot of physical activity decrease their risk of dementia.

**Take Action Now**

- **Incorporate movement into your day.** Find a physical activity you enjoy, and just do it, every day. Try walking outside. Clean your home. Take a yoga or tai chi class.

- **Train smart.** Partner with a fitness professional at Charter House or the Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center to help you engage in proper techniques and have all your bases covered in your fitness program.

- **Try a video.** To help you get started, get a free copy of the Mayo Clinic Patient Education videos Mindful Movements: Gentle Yoga and Gentle Movements Tai Chi Qigong.

- **Track your movement.** Use a pedometer or an activity monitor (Fitbit, Gruve, etc.) to track your total daily movement. Try to increase your daily total to reach your goal.

- **Engage Your Mind.** Participate in activities that combine movement with cognitive engagement.

**GOAL:** Strive to achieve 10,000 steps per day through walking or other physical activity.

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**Expert Insight**

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