



A Healthcare Provider's Guide To Healthy Aging

This material is provided by UCSF Weill Institute for Neurosciences as an educational resource for health care providers.





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Healthy Aging

Definition

The World Health Organization defines healthy or “active” aging as optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life and life expectancy as people age.¹ This is accomplished on many levels involving community resources that promote safety, health and well-being, while minimizing or preventing disease. Active/healthy aging also stresses the need for adequate protection, security and care.

Some mild changes in cognition are considered a normal part of the aging process. Normal age-related changes may affect visual and verbal memory, visuospatial skills, and the ability to name objects. Some skills such as vocabulary and verbal reasoning remain unchanged or may even improve during the aging process.

Strategies for Healthy Aging

There are lifestyle habits that promote health and well-being. Research suggests that the combination of good nutrition, physical activity, and mental and social engagement may provide benefit in promoting health although more study is needed to determine the actual mechanisms.^{2,3} A heart-healthy diet (lower in sugar and fat and higher in vegetables and fruit) is considered to be good for both the body and the brain. An example is the Mediterranean diet that promotes nutrition based on fruit, vegetables, nuts, and grains with limits on consumption of red meat and saturated fats.

Physical exercise has been associated with improvement of mood and mobility, and a decrease in the risk for falls.^{4,5} Physical activities

that are socially engaging (walking or swimming with a friend and participating in exercise groups) can be especially enjoyable. Engagement in activities that are mentally stimulating (crossword puzzles, sudoku, computer games) is encouraged as long as the activity is enjoyable.

The National Institute on Aging has more information on tips for maintaining your health: nia.nih.gov/health

Sleep is a critical focus in healthy aging as disrupted sleep can negatively impact memory and thinking, though the mechanisms are not well understood.⁶

Components of sleep hygiene include:

- Avoid napping during the day
- Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol too close to bedtime
- Get regular exercise
- Avoid eating right before sleep
- Ensure adequate exposure to natural light
- Establish a regular relaxing bedtime routine
- Associate your bed with sleep. It's not a good idea to use your bed to watch TV, listen to the radio, or read.

For more details on sleep hygiene, you can refer to the National Sleep Foundation at sleepfoundation.org/ask-the-expert/sleep-hygiene

References

1. What is “active ageing”? World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/ageing/active_ageing/en/. Accessed April 3, 2017. 2. Barnes DE. The mental activity and exercise (MAX) trial: A randomized, controlled trial to enhance cognitive function in older adults with cognitive complaints. *Alzheimer's & Dementia*. 2010;6(4). 3. Jedrzewski MK, Ewbank DC, Wang H, Trojanowski JQ. The Impact of Exercise, Cognitive Activities, and Socialization on Cognitive Function. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias*. 2014;29(4):372-378. 4. Howe T, Waters M, Dawson P, Rochester L. Exercise for improving balance in older people. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. 2004. 5. Podewils LJ. Physical Activity, APOE Genotype, and Dementia Risk: Findings from the Cardiovascular Health Cognition Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2005;161(7):639-651. 6. Yaffe K, Falvey CM, Hoang T. Connections between sleep and cognition in older adults. *The Lancet Neurology*. 2014;13(10):1017-1028.