

5 feel-good ways for seniors to live the life they want

Mary Giles, for Maple Knoll Village Published 6:00 a.m. ET Nov. 15, 2019

From connecting with others to eating right, this is how to stay active and feel young.



Having fun and being social can help you stay youthful as you age. (Photo: Maple Knoll Village)

The key to living the life you want as you age — physically and mentally — is practicing a healthy lifestyle. And here's the good news: It's never too late to make small changes that can have a big impact on your quality of life by helping you stay strong and feel good.

For many older adults, prioritizing a healthy lifestyle can mean moving to a [retirement community](https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5) (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5>), such as Maple Knoll Village in Springdale, where it's easy to take advantage of wellness centers, planned activities, classes and healthy meal choices.

Regardless of whether you live at home or among your peers, here's what to keep in mind to stay youthful as you age.

Secret #1: Break out of your rut

Variety is the spice of life, and trying new things is never more important than as you age. According to the Alzheimer's Association, 10% of Americans age 65 and older are living with dementia, but keeping your brain active can help prevent memory loss and cognitive decline. It does not always have to be elaborate: Walk a different path on your daily stroll, read, attend an event, try sudoku or online games, or learn a new instrument or language. Even better, join a class or take a course since you'll learn a new skill and meet new people.

One great option for older adults: laughter yoga, an energizing new activity that's gaining popularity around the world. It's a combination of laughing, breathing, moving and stretching designed to engage core muscles and reduce stress. "It releases the feel-good chemicals serotonin and endorphins into your brain," says Robert Rivest, a laughter yoga master trainer in Springfield, Massachusetts. You can join a class near you, where the laughter will be contagious, or learn — and laugh — along to a video at [robertrivest.com](https://www.robertrivest.com) (<https://www.robertrivest.com/>).

Secret #2: Get out of the house

Loneliness is literally bad for your health. [Studies](https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-do-we-know-about-healthy-aging) (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-do-we-know-about-healthy-aging>) show seniors who are social are at a lower risk for health problems such as depression and dementia, and may even live longer. In fact, [one study](https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316) (<https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316>) found a lack of strong relationships increased the risk of premature

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ities you enjoy and where you might meet new friends. A good goal to keep in mind:
a real life, not just by text or email, which doesn't tend to have the same mood-

Go ahead and join a dance group, play bridge, sign up for an art class. For instance, at [Maple Knoll Village](https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5) (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5>), residents are encouraged to connect with others in the community and participate in fun activities that include outings to sporting events, weekly happy hours and gardening groups — a lifestyle that can help seniors feel young again.

If you're not sure where you want to spend your time, consider volunteering. You'll meet new people while gaining a sense of meaning and purpose. Here to help: The websites [volunteermatch.org](https://www.volunteermatch.org) (<https://www.volunteermatch.org>), and [pointsoflight.org](https://www.pointsoflight.org/) (<https://www.pointsoflight.org/>), which pair volunteers with opportunities nationwide.



It's never too late to learn a new skill or pick up a new hobby. (Photo: Maple Knoll Village)

Secret #3: Shift your perspective

Growing older means adapting to a lot of change, such as changes in your body, retiring from a career, watching friends relocate, or experiencing the loss of loved ones. While it's not always easy to stay positive in the face of such transitions, [evidence](https://academic.oup.com/psychogerontology/article/66B/6/675/588906) (<https://academic.oup.com/psychogerontology/article/66B/6/675/588906>) suggests people who are grateful and who have a rosier outlook may live longer, have fewer health problems and even recover better from hospitalizations. For instance, [one study](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12150226) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12150226>) found those who had a positive attitude about aging were able to climb stairs, do housework and perform other activities associated with younger people — and they lived nearly eight years longer. In [another study](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2901870/) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2901870/>), of almost 100,000 women, those who were optimists were 30% less likely to die of heart disease.

Here's something else you may not know: Having an optimistic attitude can be learned. To keep your mood up, write in a gratitude journal (or simply name three to five things you are grateful for) every day. Set goals to give yourself something to strive for and look forward to. And spend time with other positive people who can help you learn to face aging with contentment.

To relieve stress, which can be [more difficult](https://www.health.harvard.edu/aging/how-stress-affects-seniors-and-how-to-manage-it) (<https://www.health.harvard.edu/aging/how-stress-affects-seniors-and-how-to-manage-it>) to cope with as you age, try the "relaxation response," a meditation technique from Herbert Benson, M.D., director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute and the Mind Body Medicine Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. Sit quietly in a comfortable position, close your eyes and relax your muscles. Breathe deeply. On each exhale, repeat a positive word (such as love or peace) or a short prayer. If other, everyday thoughts creep in, simply say "oh well" and return to your word or phrase. Repeat for 10 to 20 minutes daily.

Secret #4: Make exercise fun

Even if you've never been very physically active, [starting now](https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/health-tips-older-adults) (<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/health-tips-older-adults>) may improve your endurance, strength, balance and flexibility. You'll likely sleep better too, one of the secrets to overall health. And the endorphins produced during exercise can help reduce feelings of sadness and anxiety. In other words, moving those muscles will improve the quality of your life now — and into the future.

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What's more, exercise can have extraordinary benefits for the brain, including improving memory and thinking skills, and may help to prevent dementia and Alzheimer's disease. In one study (<https://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/719427/exercise-associated-reduced-risk-incident-dementia-among-persons-65-years>), regular walking appeared to lower the risk of dementia by as much as 40%. Another recent study (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamaneurology/article-abstract/2738357>) found that walking 8,900 steps per day, or roughly 4.5 miles, may help protect the brain against Alzheimer's. Even if you're one of the 54 million adults who suffers from arthritis, don't stop moving now. Participating in aerobic and muscle-strengthening exercise has been shown (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3487631/>), to reduce age-related decline by as much as 32%.

If you're healthy and just beginning to exercise, start slowly and work up to the CDC's recommended goal of 22 to 30 minutes of moderate physical activity a day, plus muscle-strengthening activity, like gardening, at least two days a week. (Check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise.)

Just be sure to pick something you enjoy doing — swimming, walking, tai chi — and consider doing it with a friend or in a class or club so you'll stick with it. An interesting new study ([https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(18\)30538-X/fulltext](https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(18)30538-X/fulltext)) suggests participating in social sports such as tennis, pickleball and basketball might prolong your life more than solitary activities like cycling. To further encourage physical activity, The Hemsworth Wellness Center at Maple Knoll Village (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5>) offers SilverSneakers to its members, which is a fun program that works with your insurance to provide a free membership to the fitness center.

Secret #5: Eat the rainbow, especially green

You are what you eat, and giving your body the proper nutrients can help you stay active and out of the doctor's office. However, it can be harder to get enough vitamins and minerals as you age because of several factors: your metabolism is slowing, it takes longer for your body to digest meals and food might lose its taste, so you may not be as interested in eating. In fact, according to the National Resource Center on Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Aging, one in four older Americans has poor nutrition, which can weaken your muscles and bones and leave you vulnerable to disease.

The solution: avoid processed foods in favor of nutrient-dense foods (<https://www.ncoa.org/economic-security/benefits/food-and-nutrition/senior-nutrition/>) such as whole grains; low-fat dairy; lean meats, seafood and eggs; and beans, nuts and seeds. And make a game of eating all the colors of the rainbow when selecting fruits and vegetables, which are especially rich in nutrients as well as fiber. The darker the color, such as blueberries, cherries and spinach, the better. One recent study (<https://www.rush.edu/news/press-releases/daily-leafy-greens-may-slow-cognitive-decline>) found that a single serving of leafy greens a day may slow brain aging by 11 years.

Food is an important part of retirement living, and retirement communities can make it easier for residents to choose healthy eating habits. Maple Knoll Village (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5>), for example, offers three dining options — a cafe, a restaurant and a fine dining room — where residents can entertain family, meet up with friends and eat a balanced meal.

To learn more about ways to be involved and retirement living options in your community, please visit mapleknoll.org (<https://adserver.pressboard.ca/c/link?c=201054&w=173874&l=233126&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cincinnati.com%2Fstory%2Fsponsor-story%2Fmaple-knoll%2F2019%2F11%2F15%2F5-feel-good-ways-seniors-live-life-they-want%2F4178539002%2F&s=233127&p=14243&uid=6fc76054-7a61-457b-b877-810f6ee59947&tz=-5>) or call 513-782-2717.

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