

15 proven steps for a longer, healthier and happier life

While genes play a role in human health, they're only one piece of the puzzle. Lifestyle choices – diet, exercise and even social engagement – are just as important in determining how well you'll live in your senior years.

The following 15 science-backed steps can all help you live longer, and more importantly, feel healthier and happier in your 50s, 60s and beyond

Taking care of your body



This is important at any age, but especially once you hit your 50s and 60s. Studies have linked regular exercise to continued good health. However, what you do when you're not

exercising is just as important as staying active.

1 Try walking whenever possible...

A study suggests aiming for 7,000 to 10,000 steps – or approximately 30 minutes of walking – per day. This might sound like a lot, but you'd be surprised at how much ground you can cover by running errands, such as buying the newspaper or doing your weekly shop on foot.

2 ...but don't go overboard

Too much exercise and aggressive regimens can strain your nervous system, joints and muscles, causing your body to mount a stress response. This can do more harm than good.

3 Avoid stress

Research has shown that too much stress can be just as bad for cardiovascular health as smoking five cigarettes a day. Stress increases blood sugar levels and overworks the adrenal glands, which can make you feel constantly tired. If you often feel stressed, it may be worth trying meditation, Yoga, Tai Chi and other breathing and stretching exercises.

4 Get a good night's sleep

The body produces less of the sleep hormone melatonin with age, which means you may notice yourself sleeping less as you get older. For this reason, it's worth promoting a regular sleeping pattern:

- Try going to bed and getting up at the same time every day
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and sugar in the evenings
- Avoid using laptops, tablets and smartphones for at least an hour before bed

Train the brain



Studies suggest that keeping the brain active helps boost mental function and prevents cognitive

decline. In a clinical trial funded by the Alzheimer's Society, adults over 50 who completed a brain training programme showed improvements in reasoning and memory that lasted for over six months.

5 Do crosswords or other puzzles

A joint study by the University of Exeter Medical School and King's College London found that regularly doing crosswords or puzzles such as sudoku can keep the brain functioning at levels up to 10 years younger than actual age.

6 Download a brain training app

If crosswords aren't your thing, try downloading a brain training app on your phone or tablet. Free apps like Peak, CogniFit and Lumosity have games specially designed to test various aspects of mental ability, such as memory, focus, reasoning and problem solving.

7 Learn something new

Learning new things helps forge new neural connections. Unsurprisingly, the continued ability to learn is one of the markers of a healthy brain. In 2015, Dorothea Daniels became the oldest person to ever graduate college, at 99 years of age. But you don't have to commit to full-time academic study to reap the mental benefits of acquiring new knowledge. Attending a lecture, signing up for a short course or reading a book can be just as beneficial.

8 Take up a new hobby

Retirement is the perfect opportunity to take up a hobby you were always interested in but never had time for. Aside from keeping the mind active, hobbies are fun and satisfying.

You are what you eat



It's no secret that diet plays a crucial role in your overall health and well-being. What you might not know, is that

nutritional needs change with age. As a rule, the older you are the less calories you need to consume per day. Because you're consuming fewer calories, proper nutrition is more important than ever.

9 Don't skip meals

It's not uncommon for appetite to diminish with age. But even if you don't feel hungry, it's important to eat regularly and well. If three big meals a day seems like too much, it may be worth trying smaller meals at more frequent intervals. This will help keep your energy up and prevent spikes in blood sugar.

10 Go caffeine-free

While a cup of hot, strong coffee can feel like it gives you a boost, this is usually temporary – a result of caffeine's effect on blood sugar. Caffeine also stimulates the central nervous system, which can cause anxiety, sleeplessness and other issues. For this reason, it might be a good idea to minimise caffeine intake or switch to decaf or other caffeine-free alternatives such as herbal teas.

11 Up your vitamin D intake

Older skin is typically less efficient at turning sunlight into vitamin D. For this reason, the British Nutrition Foundation recommends that people over 65 take a vitamin D supplement.

12 Consider other dietary supplements

Vitamin D aside, other nutrients become increasingly important with age. These include:

- calcium, which helps keep bones healthy
- B vitamins, which help with digestion and keep the skin, eyes and nervous system working properly
- vitamin C, which helps the body form collagen. The body needs this to heal wounds and keep other connective tissues healthy
- dietary fibre, which helps keep you regular and prevent bowel issues.

Get out and mingle



An active social life is important for a longer, healthier life. Humans are social by nature, and this trait doesn't fade with age. In fact, a psychological study found that strong social relationships can increase the odds of

living longer by as much as 50%.

13 Join a local club

Look out for local groups with whom you might share common interests. Perhaps you could join a book club, a choir or an organisation that holds regular game nights and socials.

14 Consider volunteering

If you miss the thrill of a busy workday, volunteering with a local organisation can offer an opportunity to stay active and make meaningful connections, all while giving back to the community.

15 Join the University of the Third Age

Don't worry. The University of the Third Age has no deadlines, assignments or exams. Free and run by volunteers, it's a great way to meet people and make new friends while trying something new.