

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Embracing Aging

Some cultures celebrate the wisdom and insight that comes from getting on in years. In North America, youth reigns supreme and the thought of growing old "gracefully" has been replaced by a war on aging. Whether it's battling fine lines, sagging skin or fading memory, getting older is something to be fought at every turn. But despite all the medical and technological breakthroughs one fact can't be denied: we're all getting older.

The Gifts of Getting on in Years

Discovering the rewards of aging encourages a healthy relationship with yourself and your advancing years. It can also help you appreciate the riches that older colleagues or loved ones have to offer. Getting older means:

Living life in the here and now. As people age, they start to recognize that they won't be around forever. While youths are busy stressing about landing a job, or finding a mate, the older crowd are better able to kick back, relax and enjoy life in the moment.

Getting wiser. A recent study found older adults were more effective than younger participants at providing advice and insight on major life issues. In fact, they ranked just below expert advisors (including clinical psychologists). The moral? Though the experienced voice may take a bit more time to formulate an answer, when it does, the advice it offers is usually spot on.

Working more efficiently. Age can slow the body down. But a recent experiment, which compared college-aged typists with typists in their 60's, shed new light on one of the perks of experience—efficiency. While young typists recorded quicker reaction times, the 60-plus group had no problem matching the 60 word-per-minute pace, saving time by reading ahead and conserving finger movement. The results suggest that an experienced brain finds ways to maximize efficiency and make up for slowing motor skills.

Fewer regrets. Research suggests that older people don't sweat the choices they've made in the past. Unlike their younger counterparts, who are more likely to second-guess decisions; older adults focus in on the positive. Perhaps due to an experienced perspective or a shift in priorities, when push comes to shove, the grey-haired set is less likely to live with regret.

Tips for Growing Older Grandly

Though it can certainly be a challenge at times, you can become friends with the aging process by making a concerted effort to:

Get connected. Bar none, the most important component of aging happily is to maintain meaningful relationships. Older people who are socially active not only live longer, but lower their chances of suffering depression. Broaden your network by taking a night class, joining a club or making a regular dinner date with friends or family. Connections keep you focused on what's really important: the people you care for and the lives you've touched.

Broaden your brain's horizons. Need another reason to join that class? Exploring new activities can actually help your brain build new networks of connections and stay sharp. Become a life-long learner. Switch off the TV and open a book, sign up for that course you've been meaning to take for the last

twenty years, or flex your mental muscles on the advanced Sunday crossword. ©
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Stay fit. You may not be competing in a decathlon anytime soon, but regular physical activity that elevates your heart rate—30 minutes a day, at least three times a week—helps keep your heart in shape. Resistance training with weights or rubber exercise bands builds muscle and keeps aging bones strong and healthy. The discovery that physical activity can help fight the effects of depression and actually boost the efficiency of brain function is also great incentive.

Walking, swimming and aqua-fit classes, which tend to be gentler on the joints, are great ways to stay in shape at any age. Remember to consult a doctor before beginning any physical activity program.

Remember the memory myth. Think age is the reason you can't remember that acquaintance's name? Then you might be buying into the memory myth. Many people have trouble recalling names or memorizing numbers, but are less likely to blame it on age at 25. In this case, it's better to think like a teenager and chalk up forgetfulness to stress or not paying attention. If however, you forget meeting that acquaintance altogether, are unable to recall the name of a close friend, or suffer episodes of confusion, you should consult your doctor.

Quit while you're ahead. It's impossible to reverse all the damage done by a lifetime of smoking, unhealthy eating or inactivity, but it's never too late to put a stop to bad health habits. Doing so can still significantly lower risk of heart disease and certain cancers.

Be honest in hard times. Laughter, love and loss are all part of life. As people age, loss of friends and loved ones is inevitable. Bottling up or hiding feelings can slow the healing process. Turn to friends and family for emotional support. Still struggling? Consult a professional that can help you better cope with grief.

Wise people know that getting older isn't about a battle to end wrinkles or conceal grey hair. It's about truly knowing and accepting yourself, imperfections and all; and the thrill of discovering new things about yourself, loved ones and the world outside your door. With a positive mindset and some self-reflection, aging can be an experience that's not only admired but celebrated.