



Aging Well, Living Well

It's common knowledge that the U.S. population is growing older. In 2002, almost 35.2 million Americans were age 65 or older, and 4.6 million of them were 85 or older. In fact, there are over 50,000 centenarians living in the U.S.

As we celebrate Older Americans Month this May, it's a good time to reflect on a few key strategies and resources that can help us and our loved ones succeed at "Aging Well, Living Well."

New Strategies for Aging Well

It's clear that older Americans will account for an increasingly significant percentage of the country's population. But aging isn't what it used to be, thanks in part to medical advances and the availability of a wide range of options in lifestyles, living arrangements, and community-based services. Across the country, older people are living well as they age by following a few basic principles.

A chief strategy, of course, is to maintain a healthy diet. Healthy eating can help protect against many diseases that affect older people, such as diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, heart disease, high blood pressure, and more. Older people may need to take extra care in planning their diet to ensure that they receive the nutrition needed to remain healthy. Depending on where you live, there are a variety of programs that can help, such as Meals on Wheels, meals served where elders congregate, and more.

Another part of healthy living is getting exercise. Physical activity can help older adults prolong their independence and improve their quality of life. Naturally, it's important for older people to proceed with caution, and according to their doctors' recommendations. If you are at high risk for chronic diseases such as heart disease or diabetes, or if you smoke or are obese, you should definitely consult with your doctor before becoming more physically active. But with the right guidance and precautions, it's never too late to start!

A third critical strategy is to remain actively engaged. It's hard to overstate how important it is to stay active as one ages. Whether it's finding a part-time job, volunteering your time in the community, taking some college courses, or simply keeping physically active, staying "young at heart" truly can help you live longer and better. Experts have proven the positive effects and health benefits of active engagement—including better physical health and decreased risks of isolation or depression.

Last but not least, it's important to understand the issues that may face you, and plan accordingly. For example, it might help to start learning now about some of the many choices in long-term care. Until fairly recently, nursing homes were the standard answer to the question of long-term care, regardless of one's circumstances. Today, older Americans have a much wider range of options which allow them to remain in their homes and communities rather than in institutions.

SAMPLE OP-ED ARTICLE



The more you know, the better prepared you will be to make the decisions that best meet your needs.

The [NAME OF YOUR AGENCY] is one local organization helping older citizens age and live well. If you're looking for answers or help with any of these issues or others, for yourself or a loved one, we urge you to call us at [YOUR NUMBER]. To find resources outside of this area contact the national Eldercare Locator by calling 1-800-677-1116, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., EST, or visit www.eldercare.gov.

