

SENIOR *Lifestyles* & Caregiver Guide

Care for Caregivers

Common challenges
caregivers face

Active at Any Age

Fun ways for seniors
to stay active

Back In the Swing of Things

*How seniors can
engage with their
communities*



SENIOR Lifestyles

& Caregiver Guide

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Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that as much as 5 percent of older adults living in the general community are suffering from clinical depression. Those figures are even higher among older adults who are hospitalized (11.5 percent) and those who require home health care (13.5 percent). The National Council on Aging reports that older adults are at an elevated risk of developing depression, though there's no single, specific cause increasing that risk. Chronic conditions, which the CDC estimates affect as much as 80 percent of older adults; decreased functional ability; reduced mobility; loneliness; and financial issues related to retirement are among the potential causes of depression in older adults. As difficult as depression can be, the NCOA notes that treatment has been found to be just as effective for seniors as it is in younger populations. Aging individuals or those concerned about an aging relative are encouraged to visit the American Psychological Association website at psychiatry.org to learn more about the many ways depression can be treated.



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Signs a loved one might need assisted living

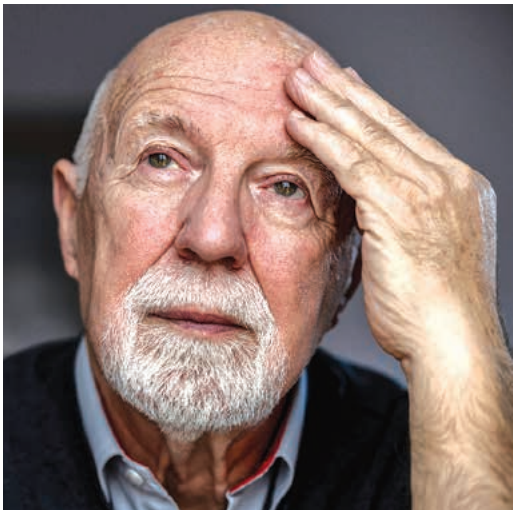
Assisted living facilities provide an invaluable service. When a medical condition, developments associated with aging or another variable affects an individual's ability to live independently, assisted living facilities can ensure such men and women get the help they need to live as fully and actively as possible.

It's not always easy to identify when an individual may need to move into an assisted living facility. Some individuals choose to do so on their own, but families often make such decisions together. As families work to determine if a loved one should move into an assisted living facility, they can look for various signs that suggest the time is right to do so. According to the Elder Care Alliance, signs that an individual may benefit from assisted living include:

- Requiring routine reminders to take medication
- Noticeable changes in weight, including weight loss or gain
- Loss of mobility or increase in falls
- Signs that household maintenance is being neglected
- Difficulty with daily tasks like grooming and meal preparation
- Increased isolation
- Loss of interest in hobbies

It's important for families to recognize that some of the signs noted above might suggest the presence of a condition or disease that would not, if treated successfully, compromise an individual's ability to live independently.

For example, the SilverSneakers program offered through Tivity Health notes that weight gain among seniors may be attributable to slower metabolism, a less active lifestyle or menopause for women. Each of those conditions can be addressed without requiring a relocation to an assisted living facility. Family members are urged to discuss anything that seems to be affecting a loved one's ability to live independently with that person's health care team before they consider if a person needs to move into an assisted living facility. It's equally important to ask a loved one's health care team which type of facility they think might be most beneficial if, in fact, they think it's in an individual's best interest to relocate. No two facilities are the same, and the Elder Care Alliance notes many specialize in specific types of care, such



as tending to individuals with cognitive issues like dementia or physical issues like limited mobility.

Assisted living facilities help millions of individuals every day. Families can work together to decide if a loved one can benefit from moving into such a facility.

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Common challenges caregivers face

Fans of Hollywood star Bruce Willis were shocked when the actor was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia several years ago. Dementia adversely affects a person's mind, memory and ability to communicate effectively. Research published in *Nature Medicine* revealed there are about 500,000 new dementia cases annually in the United States. The caregivers behind the scenes coping with the loss of the person they once knew often go unnoticed, which can make the disease even more tragic.

Many caregivers are thrust into the position suddenly and without any idea of how to navigate conditions that are plaguing their loved ones. A 2025 report by AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving says there are 63 million Americans who are family caregivers providing care for an adult or child with a complex disability or medical condition. Caregivers are central to the care process. But the responsibility that comes from tending to another person may mean that caregivers' own lives take a backseat. Indeed, caregivers face many challenges when caring for a loved one affected by dementia.

• **Financial burden:** A caregiver may have to give up a job or work less in order to care for a loved one. A 2007 report titled "Caring for Carers: The Financial Strain of Caring, Family Matters" noted caregivers experience a 20 percent lower employment participation than those who are non-carers. A decrease in income also may be compounded by the cost of hiring paid caregiving services to offset family caregivers when they need time away.

• **Physical health concerns:** Caregiving can involve long hours and tasks that require physical strength and endurance. There is a risk of injury when lifting a loved one onto or out of a bed or chair. Lost sleep may result when tending to a loved one in the middle of the night. Fatigue and stress can lead to a weakened immune system that puts caregivers at risk for illness.

• **Mental health concerns:** Caregivers often face a whirlwind of emotions that can affect their well-being. It is difficult to witness a loved one suffering an illness or disability or face the prospects of mortality day in and day out. Prolonged stress may cause caregivers to turn to alcohol or drugs to cope. They may feel helpless and slip into depression. The National Library of Medicine says clinical research shows assuming a caregiving role can be stressful and burdensome and has all of the features of a chronic stress experience. Research has consistently documented caregivers experience adverse effects on their psychological well-being.

• **Family challenges:** Caregivers can experience difficulties in their own relationships with their children and spouses. Caregivers can be pulled away from their own families' needs to take care of a particular person. Although others may realize the importance of caregiving, they may feel slighted and that their needs seemingly do not matter as much.

Caregiving is a noble endeavor that poses unique challenges. Navigating this difficult time requires caregivers to have their own support systems in place.

What seniors can do to safeguard their mental health

Mental health has increasingly been noted as a key ingredient to an individual health regimen. The stigma once assigned to mental health issues has largely dissipated, and many people now recognize that mental health should be just as big a priority as physical health.

Seniors may not have come of age in a world where mental health was prioritized, and thanks to that aging men and women may not recognize where their mental health is suffering and what they can do to combat such problems. Recognition of the importance of mental health is a step in the right direction, and seniors also can consider these strategies to safeguard their mental health.

• **Recognize your vulnerability.** The World Health Organization notes older adults are uniquely vulnerable to potential mental health issues. That's because mental health is shaped by numerous variables, including earlier life experiences and some notable stressors related to aging, such as a decline in functional ability that can cause psychological distress. Seniors also are more likely than others to experience adverse events like the loss of a loved one or even a loss of purpose, which can affect anyone upon retirement. Recognition of this vulnerability may be enough to compel seniors to seek advice and assistance on how to safeguard their mental health from age-related stressors.

• **Take time out if you're a caregiver.** The WHO notes that many older adults serve as caregivers for spouses with chronic health conditions, including dementia. The Alzheimer's Association reports that studies have found that 70 percent of caregivers report feeling stress related to coordination of care, while two in three caregivers have difficulty finding resources and support for their needs. Seniors who have taken on caregiving duties for a loved one must protect their own mental health by taking time out to care for themselves as well. Work with family members to share responsibilities when caring for a loved one. If family members cannot pitch in, then work with local government agencies to alleviate some of the stress of caregiving.

• **Make a concerted effort to socialize.** A 2025 report from the WHO indicated that roughly one-fourth of all older adults are affected by social isolation and loneliness. Social connection can significantly improve mental health and provide a sense of life satisfaction while improving quality of life. Seniors are urged to prioritize socialization. Many community-based groups, including government offices, run programs designed specifically to facilitate socialization among older residents. Take advantage of such programs whenever possible. Seniors living alone also may want to consider relocating to communities exclusive to people age 55 and over, as such developments typically offer an array of socialization opportunities to residents.

Seniors are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues, but older adults can take many steps to safeguard their mental health.



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How seniors can engage with their communities



Though a significant percentage of individuals report desires to retire later in life, many people stop working around the age of 62. The desire for a later retirement may stem from financial concerns or because some people wonder just what they will do when they're no longer working.

Retirement is a time for hardworking individuals to enjoy themselves and their newfound free time. Interacting with the community can keep the brain engaged and foster beneficial social connections. In recognition of the value of staying engaged, the following are a few ways for seniors to become more involved in their communities.

- **Join a club or group.** Identify an activity you find interesting and determine if there is a way to get involved with it in your community. Senior centers or adult activity providers may sponsor local programs.
- **Participate in worship.** Many older adults find they want to reconnect with their faith at this point in their lives, even if attending services hadn't been a top priority earlier in life. Reach out to your local house of worship and find out when services take place and which activities they offer.
- **Read to children.** Volunteer your services at the library by reading to youngsters. Interacting with other generations can be inspiring.
- **Volunteer at a soup kitchen or food pantry.** Times continue to be challenging for many people who may find it hard to cover their expenses. Soup kitchens and food pantries can be a saving grace for those who might otherwise miss meals. Volunteering some hours at these organizations can do worlds of good and help you make a difference.

- **Befriend neighbors.** A passing "hi and bye" wave may have been the norm when you were busy working a job. Now that you have free time, you can get to know neighbors better and even take turns hosting get-togethers. Moving to a retirement or active adult community with others in similar positions may facilitate such friendships.
 - **Volunteer with local government.** Find out ways you can become involved civically. Perhaps you can run in a local school board election or try to become a member of the town council?
 - **Become a substitute teacher or paraprofessional.** Many schools are experiencing shortages of qualified staff. You may find your place helping to shape the minds of youngsters by volunteering at schools or taking on part-time jobs in the classroom.
- Seniors can be more engaged in their communities, thus strengthening their "social capital," the term scientists often use to describe the strength of their social relationships, and the extent to which people feel physically and emotionally supported by their communities.

Geoff Malicoat • Paige Palumbo • Cheri Woodington



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Protect Your Legacy: Don't let Medicaid myths drain your savings!

MYTH #1

My loved one is already in a facility, so there is nothing that I can do.

Answer:
Even after placement, there are often meaningful strategic options still available. Placement does not eliminate planning opportunities, and in many cases, it is the moment when legal guidance is most critical.

MYTH #2

If my loved one receives Medicaid benefits, the state will take their home.

Answer:
Medicaid does not automatically take a person's home, and in many cases, the home is fully protected during the individual's lifetime and may also be protected after death with proper planning.

MYTH #3

I can just give my money to my kids before I apply.

Answer:
This often leads to automatic Medicaid denial, lengthy penalty periods, and unpaid nursing home bills. Giving money away shortly before applying for Medicaid is not only ineffective, it usually makes the situation much worse.

MYTH #4

I need to spend the majority of my estate to financially qualify for Medicaid.

Answer:
Medicaid rules allow individuals, and especially married couples, to retain and protect *significant* assets when planning is done correctly.

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A senior's guide to exercising safely

Exercise is an important component of a healthy lifestyle for people of any age, including the over-50 crowd. Seniors may have been told by their physicians that exercise promotes heart health and is essential to maintaining bone and muscle strength as well as balance and flexibility. Joining an exercise class or a gym also can be a social activity that promotes interaction with others of similar ages and with shared goals.

Exercise is undoubtedly beneficial for seniors, but it is important for older adults to exercise caution when starting a workout regimen. Prioritizing safety can circumvent injuries that could waylay progress. Temple Health says that seniors can suffer overuse injuries, torn ligaments or cartilage, broken bones, and other physical problems if they do not embrace safe exercising strategies. Most injuries can be avoided when following these healthy habits and guidelines.

- **Find an activity you like.** Engaging in regular exercise helps you maintain a higher level of fitness compared to those who are sedentary. Maintaining a consistent exercise regimen ensures you won't be starting over each time you stop exercising and have to build up again to your previous fitness level.
- **Start slowly and then increase gradually.** People hear "exercise" and they may think that translates to hours at the gym and high-intensity workouts. But general guidelines state older adults need about 2.5 hours of aerobic activity per week, not each day. So exercising does not have to take as much time or be as intense as one might think. Combine aerobic exercise with activities that strengthen muscles.

- **Warm up before activity.** It's important to get the body acclimated to exercise before each workout. Walking in place, doing arm circles and engaging in some gentle squats or lunges can prepare the body for what is to come. Stretch afterwards when ligaments and tendons are warmed up.

- **Remember to stay hydrated.** Touro LCMC Health says that older adults are at greater risk for dehydration because they naturally have less water in their bodies or take medications that increase risk of dehydration. Drinking enough water during exercise is key.

- **Know your limits and adapt.** A workout that is fine for a 30-year-old may not be the same for someone who is 60. You might need to embrace walking instead of running, or even swap lifting weights with using resistance bands or doing body weight exercises.

- **Focus on some balance activities.** Balance issues can cause seniors to fall and risk serious injury. Working on your balance may help to lower your risk of these types of injuries, and can be as simple as standing on one foot or marching in place.

Exercise is important for seniors, and finding ways to incorporate safe physical activity can promote good health throughout one's golden years.

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How families can share caregiving responsibilities

Family caregivers are unsung heroes. Such individuals typically provide vital services to their loved ones who cannot fully care for themselves, and they often do so without compensation.

Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates the prevalence of family caregivers across the country. According to the BLS, 14 percent of the population, which equates to roughly 37 million people, provide unpaid eldercare across the nation. Unpaid caregivers also provide vital services in Canada, where the Canadian Institute for Health Information reports such individuals provide an average of 17 hours of unpaid care each week (26 hours for those who care for seniors with dementia). Caregiving for a family member can take a toll that affects caregivers' physical and mental health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, caregivers are at increased risk for developing multiple chronic diseases since many neglect their own health needs while caring for others. In addition, roughly 15 percent of caregivers who participated in a CDC survey reported experiencing 14 or more mentally unhealthy days in the past month.

The physical and mental toll of caregiving underscores how important it can be for families to find ways to share caregiving duties. Though each situation is unique, the National Institute on Aging offers the following advice to families as they seek to share the responsibility of caring for a loved one in need.

- **Identify the care required.** The NIA recommends families discuss caregiving needs as early as possible and ideally before an emergency situation arises. If possible, the person in need can participate in this conversation and help to calmly discuss which services are wanted and needed. If a loved one is diagnosed with a condition in its early stages, such as dementia, families can then work together to identify the level of care required in the immediate future and potentially down the road should the condition worsen.
- **Choose a primary caregiver.** The primary caregiver will be the individual who accepts the bulk of the daily responsibilities of caregiving. Identifying this person early, ideally before a primary caregiver is even needed, can limit confusion should the day come when the individual needs daily care.
- **Determine each caregiver's contribution.** The caregiving team can discuss each person's skills and how they can be used to take care of the individual in need. This can be particularly useful when assigning specific tasks. For example, a caregiver who works in the medical field may be most qualified to speak to medical staff about their loved one's condition, while another who works in the financial sector may be tasked with managing a loved one's bank accounts and ensuring bills are paid on time.
- **Recognize everyone has limits.** A caregiving team is just that: a team. As noted, caregiving can take both a physical and emotional toll, so it's important that everyone, and particularly the individual chosen as the primary caregiver, receive routine breaks to ensure everyone can take care of themselves. It's important that a caregiving team maintain a degree of flexibility to account for the physical and mental challenges caregivers may encounter as they tend to a loved one in need.

Sharing the responsibility of caregiving can ensure caregivers and their loved ones in need are not overwhelmed by the challenges they might confront each day. More information about caregiving can be found at nia.nih.gov.

What aging drivers can do to improve their driving skills

Motor vehicles have come a long way since the days of the Model T. Safety features in particular have undergone significant enhancements over the last several decades. Improvements in airbags, structural modifications like crumple zones and technological features like automatic emergency braking have helped to make modern vehicles far safer than the cars and trucks of yesteryear.

While there's no denying that modern vehicles are safer than ever, the human element remains an unpredictable variable. Even in an era marked by vehicles with greatly enhanced safety features, distracted or impaired drivers can compromise the well-being of everyone on the road. Age is another variable unique to each driver that merits consideration when considering road safety. The National Institute on Aging notes that certain conditions associated with aging, including increased stiffness of muscles and joints, can make it difficult for seniors to safely operate motor vehicles. Seniors who want to ensure they're safe to drive can take various steps to ensure they are not compromising their own safety or the safety of others when getting behind the wheel.

- **Have your driving skills assessed by a trained professional.** The NIA notes that the American Occupational Therapy Association maintains a database of driving specialists who can help seniors assess their skills behind the wheel. These trained professionals may assess existing skills and offer advice about how to overcome any issues aging drivers might be having.
- **Take a driving course.** Safe driving courses can help drivers of all ages stay up-to-date on the latest safety protocols and advice on how to drive safely. Modern driving is vastly different than it was when many current seniors became licensed drivers. A safe driving course can refresh drivers' memories about safety protocols, and some may even offer advice on how to navigate modern roadways, which may be marked by distracted drivers and feature vehicles with brighter headlights that can make it more difficult for older drivers to drive at night.
- **Speak with your physicians about your medications.** A recent study from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration found that the average adult age 65 and older now uses roughly four medications. Medications produce side effects that can affect every area of a user's life, including their ability to drive. Those effects might be heightened when taking more than one medication, and interactions also can lead to side effects that might not manifest if individuals were taking just one prescription. Aging drivers can maintain an honest and ongoing dialogue with their physicians to ensure they're aware of the effects their medications might be having on their ability to drive safely. Report any new side effects the moment they appear.

Aging can compromise seniors' ability to safely operate motor vehicles. But aging adults can employ various strategies to improve their skills behind the wheel.



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Considerations for retirees thinking of working part-time

Retirement is an opportunity to wave goodbye to the daily grind. Retirees may focus on rest and relaxation, and many make travel a major component of their lifestyle.

According to a 2022 Gallup poll, Americans expect to retire at an average age of 66, up from 62 in 2022. However, most do not hold out that long; the average actual retirement age is 61. Canada used to have a mandatory retirement age of 65, but that mandate was overturned in 2009. Today, the average retirement age for Canadians is 64.4 for men and 63.8 for women, according to Statistics Canada.

Upon retiring, many retirees discover that they sorely miss getting out of the house and being productive through some sort of employment. Others may find it necessary to supplement their retirement incomes. There are a few things to know about working during retirement, particularly if a person is collecting government benefits.

- According to the Social Security Administration, those falling under full retirement age for the entire year (which was raised to age 67 for those born in 1960 or later) will be subjected to an SSA deduction of \$1 from your benefit payments for every \$2 you earn above the annual limit. For 2022, that limit is \$19,560. In the year you reach full retirement age, SSA deducts \$1 in benefits for every \$3 you earn above a different limit, but they only count earnings before the month you reach your full retirement age. For full retirement age reached in 2022 your limit on earnings for the months before full retirement age is \$51,960. After full retirement age, there is no limit on earnings.
- The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada reports that individuals between the ages of 60 and 65 who continue to work while receiving a Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) retirement benefit must still contribute to the CPP. Your CPP contributions will go toward post-retirement benefits. These benefits increase your retirement income when you stop working. However, if you continue to work while getting a CPP retirement pension and are between the ages of 65 and 70 years old, you can choose not to make any more CPP contributions.
- Keep in mind that if you are on Medicare, extra income could potentially trigger surcharges for parts B and D. It's beneficial to speak with a financial consultant to weigh the pros and cons of part-time work during retirement.
- Part-time work does not need to be daily work. Many retirees work according to how they feel. Some options include seasonal jobs, such as driving shuttles in national parks or working during the holidays in retail stores. Or you may use your expertise to consult or start a business.
- A number of people work part-time during retirement simply to get out of the house. Jobs that help you interact with a number of people can be beneficial, as socialization has been shown to benefit the mental health of seniors.

Working during retirement can supplement savings and provide structure that some retirees may be missing.

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Fun ways for seniors to stay active



Physical activity is an important component of overall health. Health experts advise that exercise can increase lean body mass, prevent conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, improve balance, and positively affect mental health/cognition. Exercise also can foster socialization with others, helping people overcome boredom and isolation.

As individuals get older, they may not be able to participate in all of the activities they enjoyed as youths, but that doesn't mean older adults must resign themselves to sedentary lifestyles. There are plenty of entertaining ways to remain physically active that can accommodate any limitations a person may have. Explore these methods for staying active.

Explore senior center offerings

Community senior centers often fill calendars with a vast array of activities, some of which can include physical activities. Hikes, walking tours, dances, and other activities all serve as entertaining ways to get out and about while meeting some fitness goals.

Garden or do yard work

The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotions says adults should get 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. Raking leaves, mowing the lawn, digging in flower beds, trimming bushes, and other outdoor tasks could help a person meet this quota in a way that doesn't seem like exercise at all.

Play games with grandchildren

Little kids may inspire older adults to be more active, as it can be difficult to keep up with those youngsters. Take infants or toddlers for walks or push them in strollers. Attach a child seat or towing carriage to a bicycle and ride around the neighborhood. Play games that require movement, such as hide-and-seek or Marco Polo in the pool. If it's snowing, have a snowball fight or make a snowman in the yard.

Take up a new hobby

Find hobbies that incorporate physical activity. Perhaps learning to salsa dance or taking Zumba® will be fun? Pickleball has caught on across the nation. The sport is a mix of tennis, racquetball and badminton that caters to all ages. Joining a bowling team is another way to get active and meet new people.

Physical activity is important at any age. Seniors can explore fun ways to stay in shape and be active to reap all the benefits of exercise.

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How seniors can cultivate a new hobby

Retirement is often characterized as a carefree time in life when adults who spent years in the workforce get to enjoy the fruits of their labors. But upon retiring, many retirees find themselves fighting boredom. A recent study from Indeed found that, as of March 2022, 3.2 percent of workers who retired a year earlier had already reentered the workforce. No two retirees are the same, and a host of variables, boredom among them, likely compelled recently retired professionals to go back to work.

Retirees who like the freedom of not working but are confronting a good bit of boredom can consider these tips to cultivate a new hobby that can help them pass the time in a rewarding and engaging way.

• **Identify new (or old) interests.** Many retirees discover new passions in retirement, while others turn back the clock and revisit favorite hobbies from their youth. A good way to begin cultivating a new hobby is to jot down a list of activities you always found interesting but never had the time to learn or became too busy to fully invest in. Some seniors hit the links for the first time in retirement, while others return to school to study subjects they find interesting but did not engage with during their college years. The options are endless, and jotting down a list of new or old interests is a great way to get the ball rolling.

• **Embrace new ways to engage a passion.** Virtual resources like online courses and book clubs conducted over Zoom with fellow readers across the nation and possibly even the globe are a great way to cultivate a new hobby in retirement. Virtual resources can be especially beneficial for seniors with mobility issues.

• **Consider locally based resources.** Community parks departments and libraries may offer an array of free or affordable opportunities for seniors to engage with a new hobby. Parks departments may offer anything from cross country skiing tutorials to age-based hiking excursions, while libraries may offer weekly crafting sessions or wellness programs to local residents. In addition to providing fun ways to discover and cultivate a new hobby, programs offered through parks departments and local libraries are great ways to meet fellow retirees.

• **Put your experience to use.** Retirees with years in their field don't have to go back to work to make use of their professional expertise. Contact local youth organizations or outreach programs sponsored by churches, libraries or local law enforcement agencies and offer to share your expertise with young people. Such opportunities allow retirees to continue to engage with their professions and help a younger generation of aspiring professionals gain valuable insight into fields they're interested in.

There's no shortage of ways for seniors to overcome retirement boredom and cultivate rewarding hobbies.

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Volunteering is good for your health

Volunteering makes an immeasurable difference in the lives of volunteers and those they help. Many people may be surprised to learn how positive volunteering can be for volunteers. Indeed, studies show that volunteering leads to better physical and mental health, among other benefits.

According to an article published by the American Heart Association and Jeffrey Burr, a professor of gerontology at the University of Massachusetts Boston, "compared to non-volunteers, volunteers have less depression, less anxiety, higher self-esteem, greater happiness, and a greater sense of meaning in life." Burr and the AHA note the health benefits of volunteering occur among all ages, and a deep look at how volunteer efforts are good for personal health shows just how profound giving back can be.

- **Reduces stress:** The Mayo Clinic reports that volunteering reduces stress and increases positive, relaxed feelings by releasing dopamine. When volunteers spend time in service to others, they report feeling a sense of meaning and appreciation, both of which can have stress-reducing effects.
- **Lowers depression:** Research has shown that volunteering leads to lower rates of depression and anxiety, particularly among people 65 and older.
- **Provides a sense of purpose:** AmeriCorps reports volunteering can provide a sense of purpose in older adults, which can help replace feelings of inadequacy due to loss of major role identities, such as wage earner or parent. This sense of purpose can improve life satisfaction and happiness.
- **Reduces blood pressure:** According to researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, older adults who volunteered for at least 200 hours annually decrease their risk of high blood pressure by 40 percent. This also may lower risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Eliminates feelings of isolation:** Volunteers working together link people to others and their communities. This can



help people overcome feelings of isolation, which may come from being new to a community or being a senior and having a smaller social circle.

- **Increases happiness:** Those who volunteer regularly tend to be happier and more empathetic towards others. Volunteering also instills a sense of pride that can make people happier.
- **Keeps the mind active:** Individuals who volunteer can improve their cognitive health. That's because volunteering engages a person in new skills, requires them to solve problems and keeps them mentally stimulated through various activities.
- **Improves physical health:** Some volunteer activities will involve physical tasks that can contribute to improved physical health because they constitute moderate exercise.

Volunteering offers a number of benefits that can improve both physical and mental health for those donating their time to help others.



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Long shifts are another example of nurses' commitment to quality care



Few likely forget scenes that emerged during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic when nurses working in hospitals overwhelmed with sick and dying patients were applauded by local residents. The American Nurses Association notes that 12-hour shifts are the standard for many nurses working in hospital settings. The lengthy, often exhausting shifts worked by nurses are another example of their devotion to their patients, as the ANA notes one of the reasons nursing shifts are so long is to ensure better continuity of care for patients. With just two shift changes per day, hospitals reduce patient handoffs, and the ANA notes that decreases the risk for miscommunication or misunderstandings that could compromise patient care and health.

Though 12-hour shifts are the norm for nurses working in hospitals, the ANA notes that such schedules can have drawbacks, and those can adversely affect nurses. Fatigue from 12-hour shifts, which can and often do last longer than 12 hours thanks to paperwork and additional tasks nurses may not be able to get to during ordinary working hours, can lead to burnout. In addition, nurses typically have limited downtime on workdays, which means they have few hours to spend with family and friends on days when they work. And nurses working 12-hour shifts may find they spend a significant portion of their time off recuperating from their long shifts, which can adversely affect their overall quality of life.

Twelve-hour shifts are another example of the selfless commitment exhibited by nurses working in hospital settings.

How to protect long-term cognitive health

Individuals can safeguard brain health - particularly cognitive health - by taking these steps.

Be more health-conscious
Working with doctors, individuals can put their health first. This includes getting routine screenings, managing chronic health problems, limiting or avoiding alcohol and nicotine products, and getting the recommended amount of sleep each night.

Manage high blood pressure
All chronic conditions cause long-term repercussions, but the NIA indicates that observational studies show having high blood pressure in mid-life increases the risk of cognitive decline later in life. Lowering blood pressure lowers the risk for mild cognitive impairment and possibly dementia.

Challenge your brain
Harvard Medical School says nurturing social contacts, engaging in stimulating mental activities like reading and doing puzzles, seeing new places, and learning new things can help keep the brain in top form.

Manage stress
Stress can take its toll on the body, and there is reason to believe that it may adversely affect cognitive health as well. Make every stride to reduce stress, whether that involves taking vacations, meditating, laughing with friends and family, or engaging in relaxing activities that relieve stress.

Get enough vitamin D
Vitamin D is linked to a host health benefits, including its potential to promote a healthy brain. Individuals can get more time outdoors to get vitamin D naturally from the sun and eat foods rich in vitamin D. If doctors find that vitamin D levels are exceptionally low, supplementation can help.

Cognitive health should be a priority. Adults can employ various strategies to reduce their risk of cognitive decline as they age.

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