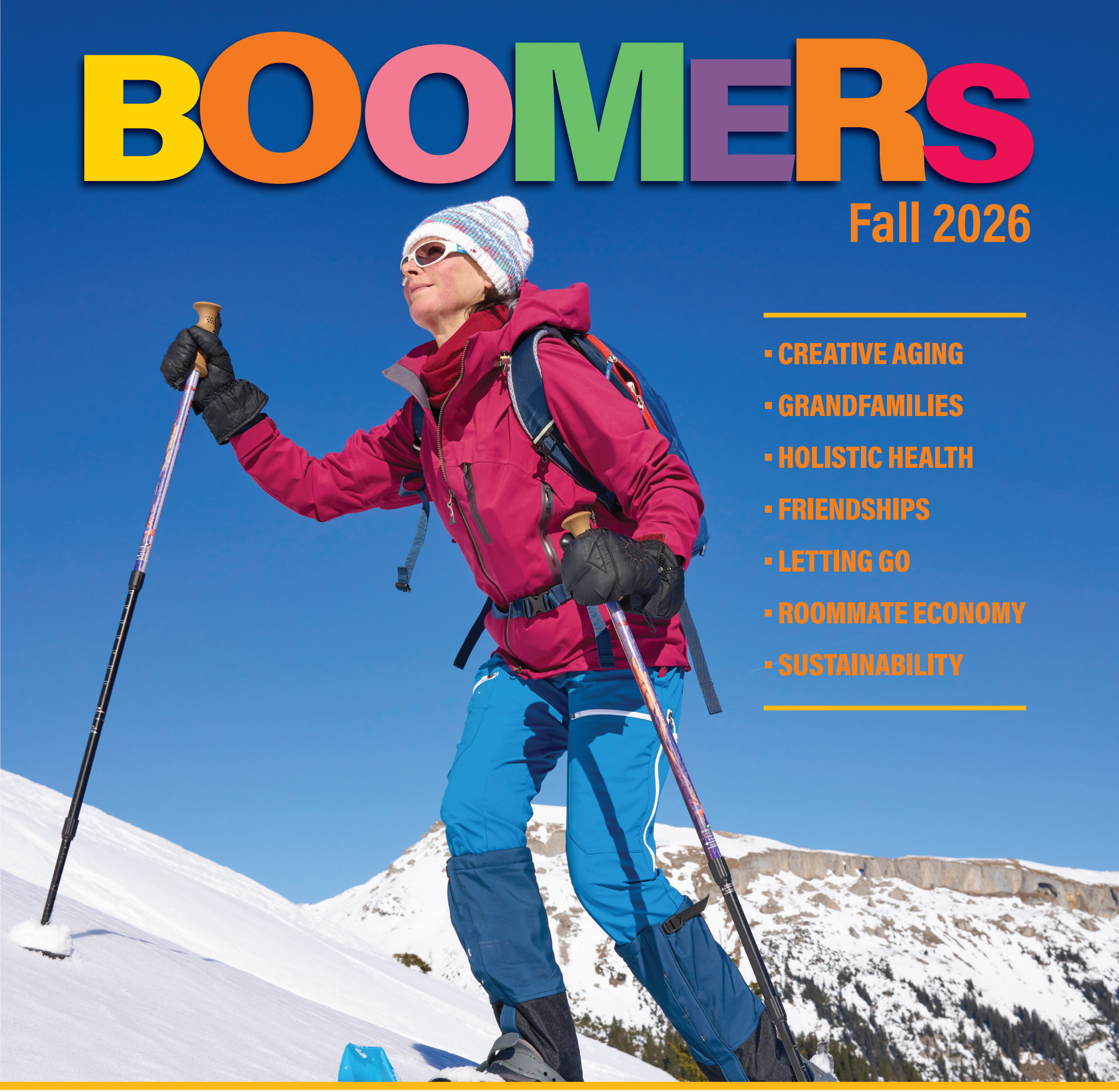
BOOMERs

Fall 2026



- CREATIVE AGING
- GRANDFAMILIES
- HOLISTIC HEALTH
- FRIENDSHIPS
- LETTING GO
- ROOMMATE ECONOMY
- SUSTAINABILITY

Making Art, Making Connections

There is no expiration date on creativity.



Musicians can continue playing throughout their lives. Dancers still take the stage well into their later years. A person who never picked up a paintbrush before retirement may discover a passion for watercolor at 70, while someone else may return to writing, woodworking, quilting or theater after decades spent concentrating on work and family.

That is part of the idea behind creative aging: recognizing that older adults are not simply audiences for the arts, but artists, makers, performers and learners themselves.

Research supported by the National Institute on Aging has explored how activities including music, theater and visual art may contribute to health and well-being in later life. Studies have suggested potential benefits in areas ranging from social connection and quality of life to cognitive and emotional health, although researchers continue to investigate exactly how and for whom those benefits occur.

Creating for the Joy

Creative activity can take countless forms.

Someone might join a community choir, audition for a play, take up photography or learn an instrument. Others may prefer solitary pursuits such as writing memoirs, sewing, carving wood, drawing or making jewelry.

The goal does not have to be mastery.

In fact, later life can provide an opportunity to try something without the pressure to turn it into a career, earn a grade or even be particularly good at it. A beginning pottery class can simply be a beginning pottery class.

For people who have practiced an art form for decades, aging also does not mean stopping. Artists may adapt technique, repertoire, materials or expectations as their bodies and circumstances change while continuing to create.

Art Creates Community

Many creative pursuits bring people together.

Community theater rehearsals, quilting circles, writing groups, dance classes and choirs provide regular opportunities for interaction and shared purpose. Strong social connections are associated with better mental and physical health, making the community surrounding an activity potentially as meaningful as the activity itself.

Creative communities can be multigenerational. A theater production, orchestra, art class or makerspace may put people decades apart in age beside one another, working toward the same goal rather than dividing participants by generation.

It is Never Too Late

Perhaps one of the most liberating ideas behind creative aging is that a person's artistic identity does not have to be established early in life.

Retirement or a change in responsibilities can create time to revisit an old interest or pursue something that was postponed for years. Community centers, colleges, libraries, arts organizations and studios increasingly offer classes and programs for adults at a variety of experience levels.

And creativity itself can keep evolving.

A longtime dancer might become a choreographer. A performer may begin directing. A lifelong musician might decide one instrument has become physically difficult and discover another.

The medium can change. The scale can change. The body certainly changes.

The desire to make something, however, can last a lifetime.

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Connection Across the Years

Friendship does not come with an age requirement.

A 30-year-old and a 75-year-old may meet through community theater. A retired teacher and a college student might volunteer for the same organization. Neighbors separated by several decades could discover they share a love of gardening, books, sports or local politics.

Those relationships are examples of intergenerational friendships, connections between people of different generations that exist outside traditional family roles.

They can offer something friendships among peers cannot always provide: Regular contact with people whose experiences, references and perspectives were shaped during a very different period of life.



More than Mentoring

Intergenerational relationships are sometimes portrayed as a one-way exchange in which an older person dispenses wisdom to someone younger.

Real friendships tend to be less tidy.

Older adults may share professional experience, practical knowledge, history or perspective. Younger friends may introduce different cultural experiences, technology, music or ideas. Either person may be the one giving advice, offering support or teaching the other something new.

Research into formal intergenerational programs has found that bringing generations together can increase understanding and improve attitudes about other age groups. A review of such programs found benefits that included opportunities to develop relationships and challenge stereotypes about aging.

Friendship can accomplish much the same thing informally. Getting to know an individual makes it harder to reduce an entire generation to clichés about what young people or old people supposedly think and do.

Connection Matters at Every Age

Social relationships are an important part of well-being throughout life.

The National Institute on Aging notes that social isolation and loneliness can affect older adults' health and encourages activities, volunteering and other opportunities to build meaningful connections.

Intergenerational friendships can widen that social world.

For an older adult, friendship with younger people can provide connections beyond a peer group that may become smaller through retirement, relocation, illness or loss. Younger people, meanwhile, can gain relationships with adults outside the roles of parent, supervisor or teacher.

Stanford researchers studying intergenerational engagement have pointed to benefits on both sides, including opportunities for older adults to find emotional satisfaction and purpose while younger people gain access to experience and support.

Finding Common Ground

These friendships rarely begin with someone deciding, "I need a friend who is 40 years older than I am."

They are more likely to grow organically from shared interests.

Volunteer organizations, arts groups, faith communities, libraries, community gardens, classes, recreational clubs and neighborhood organizations naturally put people of different ages in the same room. Repeated contact gives acquaintances the opportunity to become friends.

And once that happens, the age difference may become one interesting part of the relationship rather than its defining feature.

After all, friendship has always depended less on matching birth years than finding someone whose company is worth keeping.

The Art of Downsizing Memories

Over a lifetime, possessions can become more than objects. They can be reminders of people, places and experiences, which is why deciding what to do with them can be one of the hardest parts of simplifying a household.

The process is sometimes called downsizing, but when sentimental belongings are involved, it is less about reducing clutter than deciding how memories will be carried forward.

Start with the Story

Not every meaningful possession needs to remain in the family forever.

What may matter most is preserving the story that gives the object significance. AARP downsizing experts recommend talking about the memories associated with belongings rather than concentrating only on whether an item should be kept or discarded.

That can mean writing the story behind an heirloom, labeling old photographs or recording a conversation about treasured possessions.

Digital tools offer another option. Photographs, letters, recipes and documents can be scanned, allowing family members to preserve and share them even when the originals cannot all be kept.

A photograph of an object can sometimes preserve its emotional meaning without requiring someone to store the object itself.

Let the Next Generation Choose

One potentially difficult lesson is that something treasured by one generation may not hold the same meaning for the next.

Adult children or grandchildren may not have room for furniture, place settings, collections or boxes of family memorabilia. Asking relatives what they really want can prevent an heirloom from becoming an obligation.

Giving meaningful objects away while their owner is still alive can also turn the process into an opportunity. That allows the giver to explain why the object mattered and, perhaps, see it begin another chapter.

Keep What Matters Most

There is no rule requiring someone to become a minimalist.

A few carefully chosen objects can still carry decades of history. The goal is not to strip a life down to bare shelves, but to decide which possessions deserve the space they occupy.

Experts often recommend beginning slowly rather than attempting to sort a lifetime of belongings in a weekend. Even one drawer, box or shelf can be enough for a first session.

Some things will be donated. Others will be given to family or friends, sold or recycled. And some will remain exactly where they are.

Because downsizing memories is not really about deciding how much a person owns. It is about deciding which stories to keep close, which ones to share and which ones are ready to travel on without you.

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Child-Rearing *Again*

Grandparents are often associated with birthday presents, family stories and the occasional opportunity to spoil the grandchildren.


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But for millions of families, grandparents play a much bigger role: They are raising the children.

More than 2 million grandparents in the United States are responsible for grandchildren living with them, according to federal data. Most have been doing the job for at least a year, and many have been raising their grandchildren for considerably longer.

These households are often called grandfamilies, part of the broader category of kinship families in which children are raised by grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, other relatives or close family friends.

Parenting the Second Time Around

Grandparents may assume full-time care for many reasons, including a parent's death, illness, substance use, incarceration, military deployment or other family circumstances.

The transition can arrive unexpectedly. Someone who had planned for retirement may suddenly need to budget for school clothes, arrange transportation, help with homework and navigate a world of apps, school portals and children's activities.

There can be emotional complexity as well. Grandparents may be supporting grandchildren who have experienced grief, disruption or trauma while simultaneously worrying about their own adult children.

Yet grandfamilies can also offer children something enormously valuable: the ability to remain within a family network and maintain connections to people, traditions and communities they already know.

Federal child welfare policy recognizes relatives and other kin as important placement options when children cannot safely remain with their parents.

When Family Life Meets Paperwork

One of the biggest challenges can be determining exactly what authority a grandparent has.

Having a child living in the home does not automatically give a caregiver legal custody. Depending on the circumstances and state law, grandparents may encounter questions about enrolling a child in school, authorizing medical care, obtaining health insurance or applying for benefits. Options can include consent agreements, custody, guardianship or adoption, each with different consequences.

Because laws vary by state, families facing these decisions may benefit from qualified legal assistance rather than relying solely on informal family arrangements.

Finding Support

Grandparents do not have to navigate their new responsibilities alone.

The federal National Family Caregiver Support Program includes services for eligible grandparents and other older relatives raising children, while state and community programs may offer support groups, respite care, legal assistance, benefits counseling and help locating other resources.

Grandfamilies.org maintains state-specific information on laws, programs and resources for kinship caregivers.

Becoming a parent again may not have been part of the retirement plan. But for many grandparents, opening their homes allows children they love to remain connected to family.

The result is a family structure that may not follow the expected timeline but is built around something generations have always done — showing up for one another.



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* AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. Caregiving in the US 2025: Caring Across States. Washington, DC: AARP. October 28, 2025. https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00383.001

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Sharing a Home *in Later Life*



For some older adults, the next chapter of home life may look surprisingly familiar — a roommate down the hall, someone else's groceries in the refrigerator and a conversation happening over the morning coffee.

House sharing is emerging as one option for people who want to reduce expenses, remain in their homes or simply have more company. The arrangement can take many forms. Friends might rent or buy a home together. An older homeowner might rent a spare bedroom. Siblings or other relatives may decide that sharing a household makes more sense than maintaining separate ones.

It is not a retirement community or assisted living. It is simply people deciding that living together works better than living apart.

Sharing the Bills

The financial appeal is straightforward.

Housing can consume a significant part of a household budget, particularly for people living on fixed or retirement incomes. Sharing a home can divide expenses such as rent or mortgage payments, utilities, internet service and household maintenance.

For homeowners, renting an unused bedroom may provide additional income that makes it easier to remain in a longtime home. AARP has highlighted house sharing as one strategy older homeowners are using to offset expenses and support aging in place.

The arrangement may provide practical benefits as well. Housemates might divide cooking, yard work or other chores according to their interests and abilities, although everyone should be clear about expectations before moving in.

Company Without Giving Up Independence

Money is only part of the equation.

Older adults can be particularly vulnerable to social isolation because of circumstances such as living alone or losing friends and family members. The Administration for Community Living notes social connection is an important component of well-being for older adults.

That does not mean everyone who lives alone is lonely, or that simply adding a roommate guarantees friendship. The National Institute on Aging distinguishes between loneliness and social isolation and notes that people can experience one without the other.

Still, a compatible housemate can create opportunities for everyday connection: sharing a meal, watching a movie, exchanging stories or simply knowing someone else is nearby.

Making the Match Work

Successful house sharing requires more than finding someone with an available bedroom.

Potential housemates should discuss finances, privacy, overnight guests, pets, chores, food, noise, smoking, schedules and how shared spaces will be used. A written agreement can help prevent misunderstandings, even when the people involved are longtime friends or relatives.

When strangers are considering living together, background and reference checks can provide another layer of reassurance. Some home-sharing programs and matching services help older adults identify potential housemates and establish expectations before anyone moves in.

Just as important is compatibility. One person's dream household may include shared dinners and regular conversation. Another may want primarily to split expenses and otherwise live independently.

The goal is not to recreate college roommate life decades later.

It is to create a household that works for the people living in it, whether that means friendship, financial breathing room, practical support or simply someone else turning on the kitchen light in the morning.



Greener Living, Healthier Aging

Sustainability is changing how homes, workplaces and neighborhoods are designed. Senior living communities are part of that shift.

For communities serving older adults, greener design can mean more than reducing an environmental footprint. Energy efficient buildings, improved indoor air quality, access to outdoor spaces and opportunities to walk or garden can contribute to creating places that are comfortable and pleasant to live in.

The U.S. Green Building Council describes green buildings as those designed to be healthier and more efficient while reducing their environmental impact. Its LEED certification system considers factors including energy and water use, materials and indoor environmental quality.

Building Greener and Healthier

Some sustainability measures are largely invisible to residents.

Energy efficient heating and cooling systems, LED lighting, water-saving fixtures and improved insulation can reduce the resources a building uses. Renewable energy, including solar power, can take that effort further.

Other green building decisions may directly influence daily comfort.

Indoor air quality is one example. Americans spend about 90% of their time indoors, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, and older adults can be particularly vulnerable to the effects of indoor air pollution. Proper ventilation, filtration and reducing sources of pollutants can help create healthier indoor environments.

Designers can also consider natural light, views and building materials as they create spaces intended to support both sustainability and well-being.

Making Sustainability Part of Daily Life

A greener community is not created by architecture alone.

Senior living communities can incorporate sustainability into everyday operations through recycling and composting programs, food sourcing, transportation options, reduced food waste and resident gardening projects.

Residents themselves may want opportunities to participate. Someone who spent decades recycling, gardening or making environmentally conscious choices does not necessarily lose those priorities when moving to a senior community.

That may be one of the most important ideas behind sustainable senior living: A community can support both the needs of the people who live there and the world beyond its doors.

Greener choices do not have to be dramatic. Sometimes they begin with a more efficient light fixture, a better walking path or a garden just outside the window.

Caring for the Whole Person

Healthy aging involves more than keeping track of blood pressure, medications and doctor appointments.

Increasingly, the conversation includes what happens between those appointments: what people eat, how they move, how well they sleep, how they manage stress and whether they have meaningful connections with others.

That whole-person approach is at the heart of holistic wellness. Rather than focusing exclusively on a particular condition or symptom, it considers the many factors that can influence a person's physical and emotional well-being.

For older adults, that can mean combining traditional health care with nutrition programs, exercise, meditation, massage, acupuncture, tai chi and other complementary approaches when they are appropriate.

Looking Beyond a Diagnosis

The fundamentals of healthy aging are not particularly exotic.

The National Institute on Aging recommends regular physical activity, nutrient-rich foods, stress management, medical care and staying connected with other people as important components of healthy aging.

Those needs can become more complex with age. Someone managing arthritis, for example, may be thinking not only about pain treatment but about maintaining mobility, continuing favorite activities, sleeping comfortably and staying socially engaged.

Wellness programs can help address several pieces of that picture. Senior centers and community programs may offer exercise and


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health-promotion programs, nutrition education, health screenings and opportunities for social connection.

Complementary, Not Necessarily Alternative

Practices once described simply as "alternative medicine" are increasingly discussed as complementary health approaches when they are used alongside conventional care.

The distinction matters.

Acupuncture, for example, has been studied for several types of pain. Research reviewed by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health suggests it may provide some benefit for conditions including osteoarthritis and certain forms of chronic pain. Meditation and mindfulness practices have been studied for stress, anxiety, sleep and pain, although the strength of the evidence differs depending on the condition.

Complementary treatments should not automatically replace established medical care, and natural does not always mean risk-free. Older adults, in particular, may take multiple medications or have health conditions that make it important to discuss supplements, therapies or major lifestyle changes with their health care providers.

Wellness can be Personal

There is no universal recipe for aging well.

One person might find meditation calming while another would rather work in a garden. Someone may enjoy a group tai chi class, while another prefers swimming or walking with a friend. Nutrition needs, physical abilities, medical conditions and personal interests all differ.

That makes personalization one of the most important parts of a whole-person approach.

The goal is not to collect as many wellness practices as possible. It is to build a combination of medical care, healthy habits, meaningful activity and appropriate complementary services that supports the life a person wants to continue living.

Healthy aging, after all, is not simply about adding years.

It is about supporting well-being within them.






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