



Senior Living

The ‘Aging In Place’ Trend

There’s another option besides life in a senior community

The National Institute on Aging reports a growing trend where seniors are choosing to “age in place,” rather than living in a care facility. This might be the right path for you, as long as you’re prepared to plan ahead — and are willing to ask for help.

DEFINING THE TERM

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines the term as living at home safely, comfortably and independently regardless of age, ability or income. As we grow older, friends or family typically begin to have concerns about our capacity to safely perform daily activities. But with honest conversations, adequate planning and assistance from key home- and health-care providers, it’s become easier than ever to stay home in our golden years.

PLAN AHEAD

Needs sometimes change as we age, but there are general benchmarks that fit the lifestyle and health requirements of most seniors. Build out from there by asking yourself specific questions about conditions you are currently dealing with or are at specific risk of developing. For instance, you may be a borderline diabetic or have early onset symptoms of chronic illnesses. Discuss these issues with your health-



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care provider to get a better idea about the timeline for disease progression. Discuss these details with friends and family members so they have a good idea of what’s ahead.

ASK FOR HELP

Independent living as been bolstered immeasurably by the growing number of in-home

services provided nowadays. Personal care from family and friends, including help with getting dressed, washing hair or bathing, can be taken over by helpful aides. Other needed help might include house cleaning, shopping, yard work and laundry. Services can also deliver groceries. When inquiring about these services, ask

about special discounting since some companies offer deals for seniors.

OTHER SERVICES

Meal delivery options make it easier to stay home, but a downside of aging in place is the potential lack of social interaction. Invite friends over for a potluck or season-

al-themed dinners. Gather with family whenever possible. Seniors are also encouraged to seek out meal offerings at churches or other places of worship, clubs and senior centers, rather than eating alone. There are also adult day care and respite care options for those seniors who live with loved ones who have to work.

Eating Right

Our nutritional needs become very different as we age

The definition of “eating right” is a moving target. What was required to live an active and healthy life as a younger person doesn’t necessarily apply into our golden years. Learning and following these new guidelines will help ensure that you’re ready for what comes next.

CRITICAL NUTRITION

The best diets provide energy to complete every-day tasks, while also helping us reach and maintain recommended weight. They’re also help shield us against damaging conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and heart disease. We need more protein as we age, but fewer calories. So closely following a diet as recommended by a doctor or other health-care expert becomes more critically important.

UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES

The challenges are all around, beginning with poor eating habits developed in younger days when our metabolism was far higher. Seniors sometimes find it hard to drive or to navigate store aisles in order to buy the freshest, healthiest foods. Those in poor health may have difficulty cooking their own meals, or even feeding themselves.



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Unfortunately, some medications impact our appetites, alter the way food tastes or make our mouths feel dry. General changes in senses of taste and smell may also impact dietary choices. Some have problems chewing or swallowing their food, as well.

HEALTHY CHOICES

Doctors and dietitians will

factor all of that in while discussing your changing nutritional needs. Foods that are highly beneficial without all of those extra calories include vegetables and fruits (the more brightly colored, the better), while grains including oatmeal and brown rice, fat-free or low-fat cheeses, lean meats and seafood, beans and nuts, and eggs and poultry. It

may present the largest challenge, but seniors need to break eating habits involving trans and saturated fats, candy and chips, soda and alcohol and baked goods. Look for foods that are low in bad fats and cholesterol, drink the recommended daily amount of water to remain hydrated and become or stay active.

REACHING OUT

If you’re having trouble swallowing or chewing, schedule an appointment with your doctor or dentist to determine next steps. Add texture, light spices or color to foods if your sense of smell or taste is diminishing with age. Friends, family or a health-care provider may be required to help. Don’t be afraid to reach out.

Battling Stress

Listen to the important signals we get from our bodies

Stress is essentially a natural alarm system meant to alert you when your body senses danger. Your adrenaline rises, muscles tense up and our heart rates increase. But these shocks to the system, in particular if they become chronic, can have a long-term impact.

It's a particularly dangerous situation for seniors, putting you at greater risk of disease and infections.

STRESS EFFECTS

Older adults are naturally more susceptible to illness because of aging immune systems. The situation becomes far worse, far more quickly when you combine this natural weakening process with chronic stress. One of the most common negative health outcomes is heart problems and high blood pressure. Some may worsen matters by seeking temporary stress relief through overeating, smoking or drinking. Changes in your overall health may happen on a much shorter timeline.

HOW TO COPE

Dealing with stress is so important for those who want to get the most of their senior years. Otherwise, we risk losing our health, our independence and precious time spent with loved ones.



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Healthy ways to cope include regular exercise, which bolsters your health while helping to relieve symptoms of stress. Is there a hobby you've been thinking of trying out, like painting or knitting? Now's the time. Join a club or take part in some worthy local cause.

Volunteering is a great stress buster, since you're

staying active while strengthening your community. Consider getting a dog, since they offer companionship while also providing a ready-made excuse to exercise more often on regular walks. Focus on the parts of your life that you control, and what you can manageably do in order to live a happier, healthier life.

MANAGING YOUR MIND

Sometimes, it really is all in your head. Focus on quieting your busy mind by becoming more aware of the beauty and purpose in the world around you. Be present. Get less involved with the past, and let go of worry about the future. For some, yoga or meditation does the trick.

Others find relief through discussions with a professional counselor. You may choose a unique blending of the two, creating a mixture that's more tailored to your particular situation. The end results should be both an acknowledgment of the way stress impacts us every day and an increased ability to remain in "the now."

Driving In Your Golden Years

The challenges pile up, but you can still remain independent

Being able to drive is a key element in maintaining self-sufficiency as we age. You want to be able to visit friends, pop in at the market, pick up prescriptions and take part in social gatherings — all of which are critical to our larger well being.

But among the things that change with age is the experience we have out on the road. It becomes harder to see and hear things clearly, in some cases. It may become more difficult to physically handle operating the vehicle. Memory issues can lead to confusion about the routes there and back home.

WHY IT'S HARDER

Statistics show that older drivers are more apt to commit traffic violations and to get into an accident than those in middle age. Decreased vision, slower reflexes and impaired hearing are often to blame, according to experts. Issues with coordination and flexibility may play a role.

Acknowledge and accept these limitations, then keep a close eye on how you're doing behind the wheel. Regular exercise can help ensure that you remain strong and flexible enough to drive.

SAFETY TIPS

Visit the doctor as scheduled to maintain both your good



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health and to monitor key stats that govern your ability to drive. If you wear corrective lenses, make sure the prescription is current and still providing the best possible sightline. Hearing should be regularly checked too; those with hearing aids should always wear them when operating a vehicle. Make sure

all of your safety equipment is operational, including windshield wipers, headlights, taillights and mirrors. Turn the lights up in your instrument panel to make it easier to see.

WHEN TO STOP

Oftentimes, we know when it's time to give up the keys,

despite how hard that can be. Even with all of these elements in place, seniors may simply lose too much cognitive or physical ability to manage the stress and complexity of driving — in particular in big-city traffic. If friends or family express concerns, understand that it's because they love you.

There's no shame in taking responsibility for the safety of yourself and other drivers. Besides, there are some upsides to life without a vehicle: You no longer have to pay a car note, insurance premium or maintenance bills. And walking is one of the very best forms of exercise for seniors.

Seniors and the Sun

Older adults can sometimes be more likely to develop skin cancer

As seniors live longer than ever, their exposure to the sun has only lengthened. So has the incidents of melanoma or skin cancer. But protecting yourself from this everyday danger often comes down to a little preparation before heading out to that backyard barbecue or beach day.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

The Centers for Disease Control found that only 15% of seniors regularly used recommended forms of skin protection. Men were more apt to wear long pants, while women stayed in the shade. Sunburn rates have soared among the senior population, coming in at nearly double the national average. Sunburn, in fact, was reported across all ethnic and racial groups in the CDC's study.

HELPFUL PRODUCTS

Sunscreen is always recommended, but these products are not all alike. Look for lotions with a sun-protection factor (or SPF) of 30 or more. They should also protect you from both UVA and UVB rays. Apply sunscreen roughly half an hour before you expect to be out in the sun, and then reapply throughout the day as pool water, sweat or ocean currents wash it away.



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DRESSING FOR IT

Dermatologists don't simply recommend sunscreen. They also stress covering up as much as is possible — in particular for those who are exposed to sun light all day. Seniors should choose lightweight, light-colored fabrics that are both comfortable and cool. Purchase a wide-brimmed hat as well,

since it will provide shade for your face and scalp. As many as 20% of cataracts are caused by extended exposure to UV rays, according to the National Institutes of Health. So, don't forget some properly rated sunglasses.

OTHER IMPORTANT TIPS

Try to schedule your time in

the sun for mornings and afternoons. The sun is at its most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when it's extraordinarily easy to overheat or get a sunburn. Seek out shade, either under a tree or tent, in order to lower the risks. Take breaks while doing yard work or golfing and find a covered area to rest. Immediately find

a cool place if you begin to experience heat stress symptoms like dizziness, extreme fatigue, nausea, headaches and cramps. Seek immediate attention from a health-care professional if someone around you begins to show signs of mental confusion, high heart rate and flushed skin.

Are Supplements Right For You?

Sometimes regular checkups and a healthy diet aren't enough

Dietary supplements are no cure all. They won't treat or prevent many illnesses and diseases. But when combined with other healthy life choices, they can bolster our health as seniors in very important ways. These supplements offer sometimes-needed boosts of vitamins, fiber, minerals, herbs, amino acids and various enzymes. They don't require prescriptions, however, so you should talk to your doctor before adding any of them to your daily regimen.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

Older consumers are especially at risk for unforeseen side effects from over-the-counter supplements. Megadosing on vitamins, for instance, may seem like a good idea for the untrained, but can actually produce some health-threatening problems. In fact, some supplements may actually cause more harm than good — in particular if you're taking other prescriptions, since there can be issues with interaction that you are unaware of. Those planning surgery are also typically advised not to start taking supplements, or to stop taking them a few weeks beforehand.

MOST RECOMMENDED

Certain dietary supplements



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are more recommended than others, simply because of the way our bodies change as we age. People over age 50 may need more calcium, which works to keep bones strong. Vitamin D is also part of that strengthening process, and most people get far less than is recommended from their regular diet. Vitamin B6 helps us form critical red blood cells,

while vitamin B12 helps keep them healthy. B12 deficiency is a particular problem for strict vegans and vegetarians.

FINDING OUT MORE

The Federal Drug Administration has more information on these risks, but you should always consult your personal physician first

since they know more about the specifics of your situation. Local health-care professionals have been with you every step of the way, and now share the common goal of your good health. Develop a personalized plan.

Doctors will also help you monitor your health to ensure that you remain on the right track. That may include

tweaking your dosages, or removing a supplement all together. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't completely understand what's being recommended — and stop taking any supplement if you begin to experience negative side effects. If your everyday doctor doesn't have an answer, they'll recommend a specialist who does.

Internet Benefits For Seniors

We tend to hear only negative stories, but it's not all bad

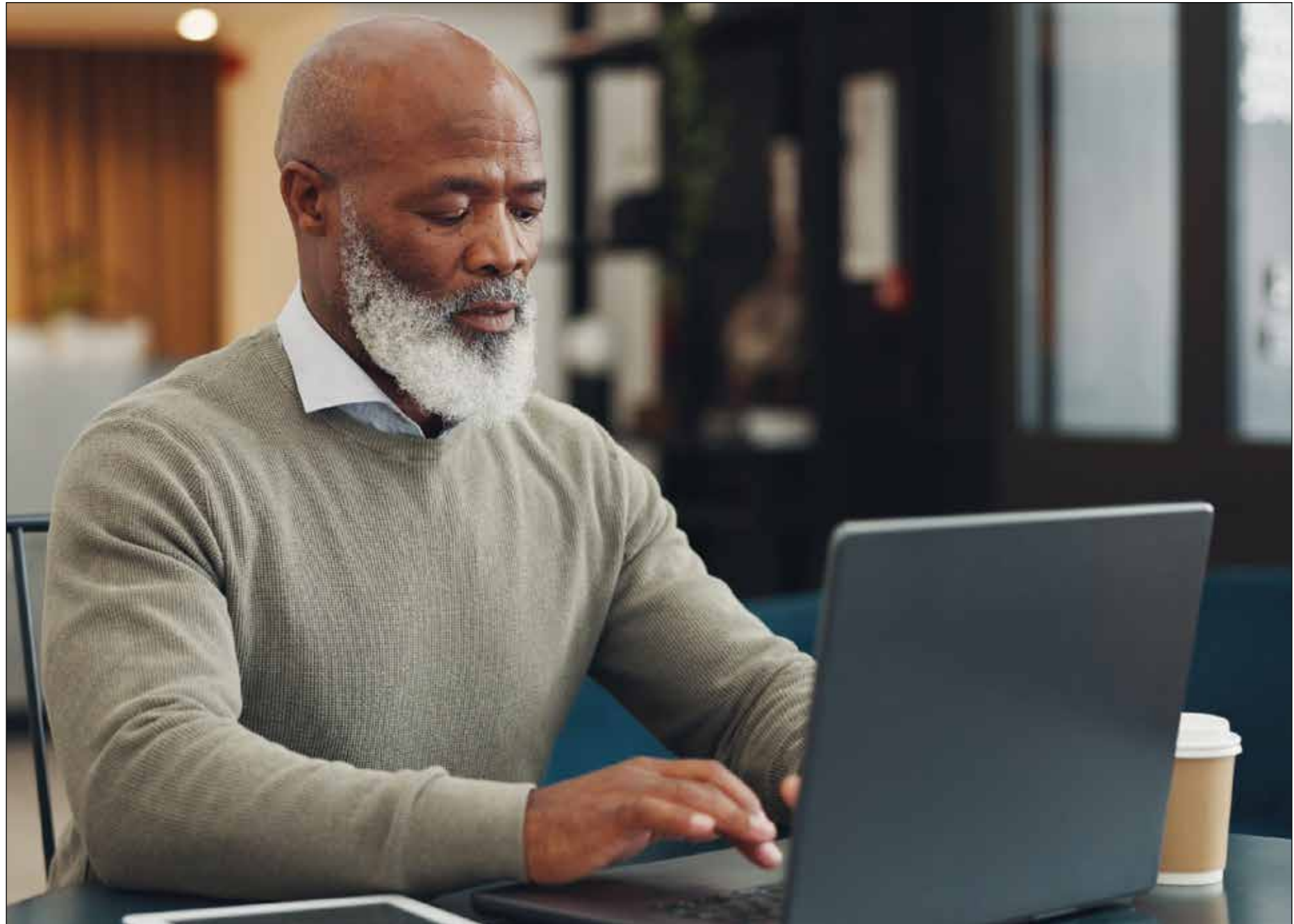
The web has brought with it an increased danger of scams for older users. Worries about losing their life savings through new technologies like online banking, tax preparation and payment methods can leave seniors feeling fraught about the whole process.

Important social bonds can be strengthened elsewhere on the internet, however, as email, texting, social media and locally based message boards offer an opportunity to forge deeper bonds with family, old friends and our community.

REMAINING CONNECTED

Friends and family tend to become more disconnected from seniors over time. Children graduate and move away, and neighbors may choose to retire elsewhere. The result is a feeling of disconnect with the relationships you value the most. But the internet can act as a critical catalyst for keeping these people close, even while they continue their faraway lives.

Web-based communication is particularly useful for those with decreased mobility. In this case, friends might live just down the street or only across town, but remain distant because the user is homebound. Among the things that can strengthen connections



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are sending pictures (both old and new), and sharing stories and recipes.

MAKING NEW FRIENDS

The internet also fills a huge need in helping seniors make new friends, something that becomes increasingly difficult over the years. Seek out group-oriented pages where people share your passion for

a particular hobby, traveling or cooking. Follow publications that discuss topics of interest, and engage in conversation with others in the comments section. Some widows and widowers have even found love on the internet later in life. There are also helpful calendar features to create opportunities to meet in real life.

INCREASED INVOLVEMENT

Engaging in learning how these technologies work is itself a form of exercise, as we challenge our minds to grasp new concepts. And of course, you'll find common ground with friends, relatives and new web-based friends who have their own struggles on the information superhighway. The internet

also helps fill in local informational gaps that have been created as traditional news media sources diminish.

Learn more and raise your own awareness about current events in your town and state, then use the web to get involved with likeminded individuals to make a difference. The next crusade might find you in a lead role.