



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Keys to Embracing Aging

Tuning into the Times

Can't teach an old dog a new trick? Centenarians (people 100 years old and older) beg to differ. When a group of 100-year-olds were asked why they have lived so long, they shared that they spent a lifetime staying in tune with the times.

While the days of Charlie Chaplin, Louis Armstrong, Ted Williams, talk radio programs, Model Ts, and party lines have been replaced with reality television, hip-hop music, multi-million-dollar professional athletes, SUVs, and smartphones, it is clear that technology and society are not slowing down. But neither are the tech-savvy seniors who drive successful aging through their zest for life and learning. Staying in tune with the times throughout life promotes lifelong learning, which increases knowledge, problem-solving, and decision-making. Staying on top of the latest gadgets and keeping up with the news stimulates the brain and can broaden social opportunities and networks. This brief introduction to today's technology will help you stay in tune.

There's an App for That (Cellphones and Smartphones)

Many people rarely leave home without their cellphones or smartphones. A cell or mobile phone is a hand-held, cordless device that can make and receive calls. A smartphone is a high-end mobile phone that incorporates computing abilities.

Smartphones have an "app" or application for almost everything. An application is a computer program that can be downloaded to a smartphone, allowing it to take photos, play music and videos, and access Internet sites. A smartphone even has the ability to act as a navigation system, start your vehicle, and activate your lights or home security system when you are not there. Whether it's a basic cellular phone or a smartphone, one of the best advantages of a mobile device is that it is portable and accessible. Charged on batteries, a mobile phone fits in your pocket and can be ready in hand to call a friend or call for help.

Computers and the Internet

Today's computers are small, fast, sophisticated, and fairly affordable. These convenient and reliable machines can be found in the majority of American homes and workspaces, where they help make jobs and life easier. For example, computers are used to type and print documents, calculate, sort, search, and store data. Computers are also used for entertainment; they play and store games, music, movies, and photos.

The majority of today's computers are linked to the Internet. The Internet is a worldwide collection of computer networks that connect users through satellite and telephone. It is also a warehouse for data and software. Many people consider the Internet to be the world's largest encyclopedia. The possibilities of the Internet and the information you can find are endless.

The Internet allows you to:

- Surf the Net. Surfing the net means spending time on the Internet to see what you find.
- Social network. Social networking services, such as Facebook, allow you to register and create a personal profile, exchange messages, and join common-interest groups.
- Email. Electronic mail, known as email, is a method of sending digital messages to or exchanging digital messages with one or more persons with Internet accounts. There is no post office or paper needed for this instant, modern-day letter writing.
- Video Call. Through the use of webcams and microphones, various computer and social media programs allow you to communicate while both seeing and hearing the person you called.
- Share, post, and update information for others to see.
- Request and provide assistance with problems and questions.
- Market, sell, and buy products and services.
- Read newspapers and other current events.
- Research your family tree.
- Plan and book a vacation.
- Access online dating sites

Video Games Aren't Just for Kids

Games aren't just played at the table anymore — they're now played on televisions, computers, mobile phones, and other handheld devices. Many of today's video games require human interaction. Popular game systems by Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony come with handheld remotes that can be used to point and detect movement in three dimensions.

This allows you to bowl, ski, play tennis, and even hula in your own living room. Such games encourage people of all ages and abilities to get off the couch and move around. Even the non-interactive games encourage attention and memory. The benefits of playing today's video games include improved:

- reflexes
- processing speed
- attention skills
- spatial abilities
- reasoning
- physical activity

Today's video games also help keep older adults' minds and bodies sharp and responsive. In fact, increasing numbers of retirement homes across the country offer video games in their rotation of available activities. Rehabilitation centers and hospitals also use video games to help patients improve motor function.

Virtual Experience

Want to earn a gold medal, practice yoga, or drive a race car — all in the comfort of your own living room? Now you can! If you don't own a video gaming system, get together with a friend or family member who does, sign up to play at your church, or at a local community or senior center, or even the local gym to give it a try.

The Sound of Music

Music is everywhere — elevators, fast food drive thrus, hair salons, banks, grocery stores, and shopping malls. While the sound of music may be taken for granted, the health benefits do not go unnoticed. Music releases dopamine, the feel-good chemical in the brain involved in motivation and addiction (Sunil, 2013). As a result, music that moves you provides a sense of emotional arousal and pleasure. It is simple to take music with you wherever you go. Portable music players such as an MP3 player, iPod, or your smartphone are electronic devices that allow you to download and save digital music and audio books. Most music and many books can be found online. To retrieve or download music or books, you simply connect the portable music player to your computer, download the material onto the player, unplug the player from your computer, plug in headphones, and take your audio along with you.

Music plays an important role in successful aging. Music exposure can also enhance perception, create a distraction from pain, reduce stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure, reduce heart rate, and even relax your muscles. In patients with Alzheimer's disease, music can even trigger memories and decrease agitation.

Extra! Extra! Read All About It

Staying connected with the world influences longevity (DeNoon, 2007; Reuters, 2007). Whether it is the television, newspaper, Internet, or radio, current events have a positive effect on long life because they encourage social interactions. For example, it is easier and more fun to engage in conversation when there are interesting topics to discuss or debate. Staying in tune to your community and the world also exercises the brain and can keep you more mentally active as you read or listen and process the news.

Conclusion

If centenarians can keep up with the times, so can you. Embracing your techie side can be fun, exciting, and beneficial. Engaging in and learning new technology keeps you mentally active and socially engaged. Staying connected to friends, family, and current events helps you feel engaged. Through the advancement of technology, there is always something new and thrilling to learn or play. Try making it your goal to learn something new once a day. Staying in tune to the times and establishing healthy lifestyle behaviors throughout your life will influence optimal aging.

Try Something New!

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