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Life Times

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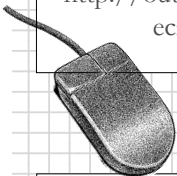
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Extension's Mission

University Outreach and Extension serves Missouri by extending research-based knowledge and high-quality educational programs to address the high-priority needs of citizens at the local level.

Keeping your brain in good shape

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“Oh, it’s just one of those senior moments” is a comment often heard, especially as we get older. It is often used to identify moments of confusion or forgetfulness.

These moments occur spontaneously, just like stopping to catch our breath if we exert ourselves more than usual. Do you remember the last time you, or someone you know, had a “senior moment”? Are you concerned that this may be happening more often than you might want to admit?

Some recent research dispels some of our previous thoughts on the slowing down of the brain, which results in forgetfulness and possibly dementia. This research offers hope that something can be done or changed to improve the working of brains.

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has done a lot to bring this matter to our attention. In the January/

February 2002 issue of AARP’s *Modern Maturity* magazine, Richard Restak, MD, says in his article called “All in Your Head” that “Our brains have an innate capacity for change no matter how old we are,” adding that “the older brain is more resilient than we think.”

This was proven in part through research that compared young and old subjects as they performed memory tasks equally well, even though the brain waves of the older subjects were weaker. This was explained by the fact that the older brains rerouted some of the messages across underused areas of the brain.

The report also stated that the older brain can partially rebuild itself. Great progress is being made to understand the workings of our brains, and there is great hope that within the next decade or so, there will be even more progress toward human therapies.

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Aging



Getting older, getting better!!

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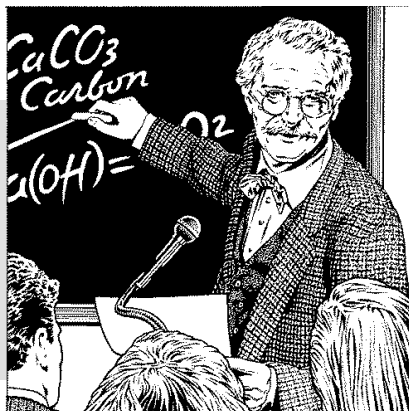
Although many people dread the thought of “getting old,” attitudes about aging have changed because many older Americans have discovered that getting older is not all that bad.

Susan Scarf Merrell wrote in *American Demographics*: “The wondrous news is that getting old is a generally positive thing. We don’t just accumulate years, we also gain wisdom which enables us to make decisions with less of the fussing and wheel-spinning that marked our teens and twenties.”

There are many positive benefits that older people have realized, according to Merrell.

Here are some of the benefits:

- **Older people have learned a lot about themselves and the world.** They have better attention spans and are more able to focus.
- **Most older people are reasonably happy with their lives.** They have an overall sense of well-being. After age 45, the rates of depression tend to decline for both men and women.
- **Older people have learned to adapt.** They seem to be more resilient and flexible. Studies support the fact that they tend to have fewer negative thoughts.
- **Older people seem to have figured out what makes them happy.** They have learned to shift priorities and simplify their lives. Relationships with the people they love become more important than how they look.

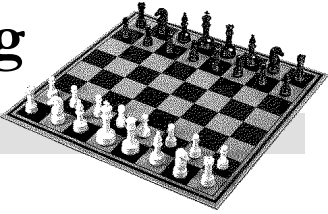


- **Sex roles start to blur.** Men reportedly become more helpful and learn to talk about their feelings. On the other hand, women tend to become more assertive and become active in meeting their own needs. This leads to greater contentment and openness in communicating with each other.

All this does not lead to a claim that getting older is all fun and games. Just ask someone dealing with a serious illness or raising a grandchild. We know that two aspects of aging are slowing down and having a less-efficient memory, but one of the worst aspects of aging seems to be some of the intolerant attitudes of younger people. However, as Merrell also points out, it is very difficult to generalize about older people because they are as heterogeneous as any other group of people.



Tips for healthy aging



- ✓ **Play games that challenge your mind.** Do a crossword puzzle. Play chess. Engage in word-oriented activities.
- ✓ **Visit the hobby or craft section at a bookstore.** You might spark a new interest or remind yourself of something you never had time to pursue.
- ✓ **Look for new learning opportunities.** Take a course through a local high school or college. Volunteer for a position in which you may learn new skills.

- ✓ **Create a story of "my life."** It can be shared with family members, as well as set you upon an enlightening memory trip.
- ✓ **Volunteer.** Volunteering allows you to remain socially active as well as share your own unique experiences and knowledge. Even in their early 80s, 28 percent of people are still doing volunteer work.



- ✓ **Visit someplace new.** Pick a place you'd like to visit and go, either alone or ask a friend. It can be as close as a new restaurant in town or on the other side of the United States.
- ✓ **Organize a video or book discussion group for friends.** This not only allows for a regularly scheduled activity that you look forward to, but can provide some stimulating, thought provoking discussions.

Adapted from
Work and Family Life newsletter,
May 1999, Susan Ginsberg,
editor/publisher,
New York City, NY.



Central Poison Control Hotline now available:

1-800-222-1222

Americans for the first time can use a single, toll-free telephone number to reach a poison control center anywhere in the nation. Callers dialing the

number will be automatically linked to the closest poison center.

National poison control officials launched the new national hotline, **1-800-222-1222**, in January 2002, applauding it as overdue to coordinate the country's 65 separately-run poison centers.

The new number is part of a \$21.2 million federal effort to update poison control centers across the country.

Half of all calls to poison centers involve preschool-age children, although calls involving adults or elderly persons tend to

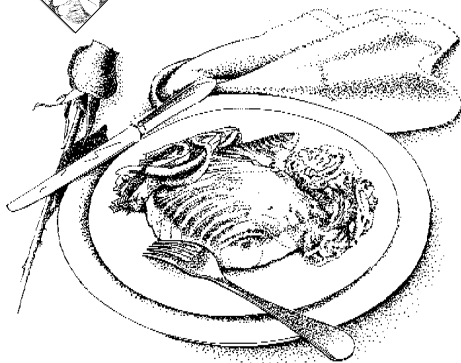
be more serious. Officials said they would accompany the new national phone number with a print and radio-based education campaign urging children to avoid household poisons and urging parents to post poison control numbers near their phones.

Household cleaners and chemicals make up the bulk of poisonous substances in homes, although perfumes, medications, and spider and animal bites can also lead to poisoning.

To obtain stickers, magnets, and other promotional materials, call the new toll-free number at 1-800-222-1222.



Aging



Making meals enjoyable when dining solo

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Eating alone can dampen an appetite when someone is facing changes in lifestyle due to widowhood, divorce, or leaving home.

Eating meals together provides a warm, social interaction that isn't there when you begin to dine alone. Here are some steps to boost your appetite and put joy back into mealtimes.



Eat healthfully, but simply.

It is not necessary to prepare gourmet meals everyday, but do include the basics. A simple breakfast includes a dairy food, grain, and fruit.

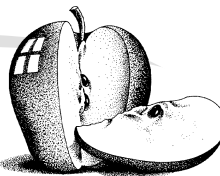
Breakfast options:

- **Don't cook at all.** A bagel, orange juice and yogurt make an easy, no-cook breakfast.
- **Cook simply.** Foods that can be easily adapted for a single serving include a scrambled egg, French toast for one, or pancakes from a mix.
- **Stock your freezer.** Consider baking and freezing your favorite recipes as an alternative. Bran muffins, blueberry muffins, and waffles freeze well. A single muffin can be thawed and warmed in the microwave as needed. Freeze banana bread in individually wrapped portions.
- **Dine on leftovers.** Who says breakfast must be traditional eggs or cereal? A healthy breakfast can be made from leftover pizza, meatloaf, or stir-fry. Add juice or fruit and a dairy food for a complete meal.



Snack options:

- **Snack on fruits and whole grains.** A banana, fresh orange, bunch of grapes, box of raisins, or wedge of melon requires little or no preparation. A bowl of cereal and milk makes an easy, healthful snack. Graham crackers, vanilla wafers, bagels and cinnamon toast are healthy



choices. Store fruit where you can easily see it. Tempt yourself. Store prepared fruit in clear containers in the refrigerator within easy sight.

Lunch & supper options:

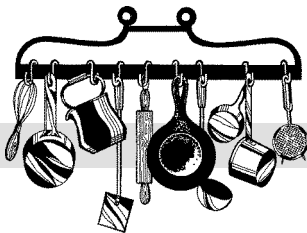
- **Burgers and sandwiches are simple to prepare.** Round out the meal with a green salad, baked beans, three-bean salad, sliced fruit, or fresh tomatoes, zucchini, and bell pepper salad.
- **Cook once. Eat twice.** A roast gets a second appearance as roast beef sandwich, beef and vegetable stew, or soup. Roast chicken breast reappears as chicken and vegetable stir-fry, or creamy chicken casserole.
- **Bring entrees to the table two or three times.** Prepare and enjoy chili and vegetable soups today. Wrap leftovers in individual portions, label, date and freeze for an easy meal next week.



- **Consider carryout meals from your local restaurant or favorite grocery store deli.** Buy a salad for one. Experiment with store-bought low-fat, low-sodium frozen entrees, and canned low-sodium soups. Not every meal must be prepared at home.



- **Think healthy.** Try to include a grain, protein, vegetable and fruit in each meal. Use dairy foods several times a day. Add cheese to sandwiches and entrees. Make hot cocoa with milk instead of water. Snack on pudding and yogurt.



- **Equip yourself.** You are more likely to cook if you have equipment suitable for preparing small portions. Buy a few cooking utensils suitable for cooking for one or two such as:
 - single serving non-stick skillet
 - small sauce pot for one-dish meals
 - several single serving, sealable containers or casseroles that go from freezer to microwave
 - clear, sealable containers for leftovers
 - mini-coffee pot
 - new cookbook with recipes for one or two.

Set the stage for pleasant dining:

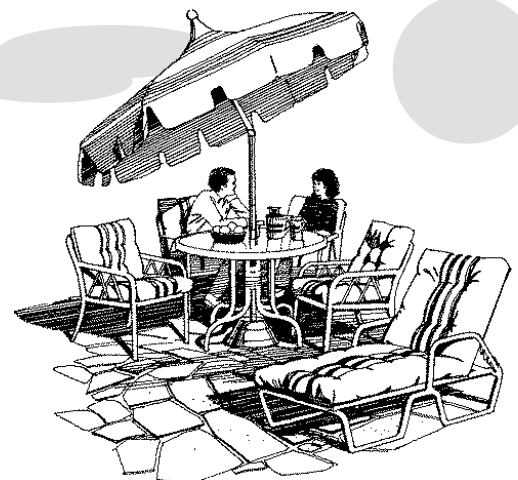
- **Decorate your dining area.** Use pretty placemats, flowers, or a favorite basket or craft. Pamper yourself. You deserve a pleasant meal.



- **Turn on relaxing music, or dine in front of the television for company.** (This is the opposite of what we tell families at mealtime when we are trying to encourage healthy eating and family communication.)
- **Change where you sit and dine.** Often sitting at the table will remind you of your lost spouse. Sit in your spouse's place. Eat on the patio for a new view.



- **Invite one or more friends to join you for lunch.** Cook together, try new recipes or share potluck. Make the entrée and invite others to bring bread, salad and dessert.



Source: *Freezing Prepared Foods*, Extension publication GH1505, University of Missouri Outreach and Extension.



Keeping your brain in good shape

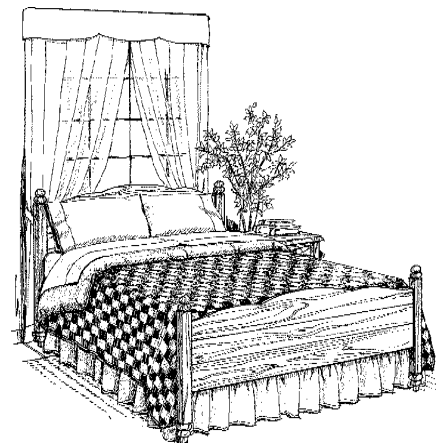
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So how do we keep our brains in good shape? Robert Friedland, MD, of Case Western University in Cleveland, suggests the following (see also page 3 for more ideas): Learn something new. Try something different, like painting or sculpting. Memorize poetry or songs. Learn to identify as many trees and birds as you can. Play an instrument or table tennis. This



might be a good time to play the video games you didn't have time for when you were younger.

Since the brain is a muscle, keep exercising it. Keep it healthy by eating wisely and getting a good night's sleep. Reduce your stress. Be aware that a deficiency in either vitamin B-12 or folate can cause forgetfulness. Vitamin E research has shown promise that it may protect the brain from some effects of aging.



Other research suggests that use of estrogen may improve both verbal and visual memory. And last but not least, caffeine in coffee or other soft drinks stimulates your central nervous system and helps you become more alert. But drink in moderation.

Life Times

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