

Joy, Perseverance and Productivity for Successful Aging

by Mark C. Krueger, M.S.G.

"When does aging begin? The day we are born!"

What is *Successful Aging*? Can getting older truly include joy, perseverance and productivity? What must be done, not only to add years to our lives, but also to add life to those years? We now have the technology to live longer than ever before, but how do we finish strong and productive in those additional years?

Aging may be defined to include four factors: environment, genetics, specific life events, and lifestyle. It is typically characterized by LOSS; in fact, most body organ systems lose function 1% every year beginning at age 30. As we age, we may also lose loved ones, income, pets, paid employment, our homes, friends, driving abilities, independence, dignity, respect and even our hair.

Aging is also characterized by diversity and heterogeneity. No two 80 year olds are alike and as we age we actually become more unlike each other. As we age we also tend to have multiple medical problems compromising multiple medical systems.

First, let's clarify some truths of aging. Senility, mental confusion and Alzheimer's Disease are NOT inevitable consequences of aging. The vast majority of older people are self-sufficient and intelligence does not decline with age. In fact, we gain maturity, experience, wisdom and accuracy. We become more responsible and reliable. Our work is steady and loyal and we gain more free time. We do not become asexual and our personalities do not change either.

So what must we do to live long, healthy and productive lives? There is no treatment, drug or supplement that slows aging and extends life! There is not enough evidence to take any amount of "anti-aging" treatments as a pill. Any reversal or slowing of aging likely will be due to changes in our lifestyle.

The answer to why some people appear to age more successfully than others probably lies in the following suggestions:

- Don't smoke
- Eat a balanced diet and maintain desired weight
- Exercise regularly
- Have regular health checkups
- Stay involved with family and friends - maintain relationships
- Allow sufficient time to rest and relax
- Get enough sleep
- Stay active and productive through work, recreation and community activities (the unproductive individual is at increased risk for illness and economic dependency!)



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- Drink little or no alcohol
- Use safety belts in the car
- Avoid increased exposure to the sun or cold
- Practice good safety habits to prevent accidents and falls
- Maintain an active spiritual/religious life
- Maintain a positive attitude and laugh often - *expect* to live a long time in good health
- Maintain sexuality/intimacy.

Remember, we need to increase our mental, physical, and spiritual exercise and also improve our diet. It's never too late to follow any of the above suggestions, but the sooner the better! Old and young alike must take responsibility for and help themselves to better health and longer lives. We age the way we lived, but we can slow the aging process quicker than science by changing our lifestyle.

Many people start life strong but finish poor - in sorrow, self-pity, inactivity and laziness, with regrets, lack of joy and lack of productivity. Many give up and fail in the second half of their lives with unfulfilling and purposeless days.

Finishing strong and aging successfully means following the suggestions we have included in this article, and maintaining and updating goals. We must be disciplined - physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. We must always look forward to something and be thankful for everything!

As we age, we may lose and suffer, but we must also celebrate our accomplishments and plan for more. The people who age the best are those who stay with it until the very end. **USE IT OR LOSE IT** is the key to successful aging.

Our later years have the potential to be the most blessed and productive years of our life if we take the appropriate actions. It's all up to us. It matters now that we are here and it can continue to matter to the future that we have been here.

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