



Four Ways to Slow Down the Aging Process at a Retirement Community

By Michele Thompson, MS

Ever wonder if there are things you can do to delay the aging process and maximize your quality of life? Did you know that moving to a retirement living community can be that "fountain of youth"?



Many believe that retirement living communities promote quality of life and make it possible for people to be healthy, happy, and social. "I like being in a retirement community because there are activities going on every day," says 82-year-old Rosemond Borboa, a resident of Wyndham Retirement Center in Fresno, California. She adds, "I've lived here for 3 1/2 years and just the socializing has greatly improved my physical and mental well-being. My life is a lot better than when I was living alone."



Even though you cannot slow down your chronological aging, say experts, you can take steps to delay the physical and mental deterioration associated with age. Sheryl Sparks, vice president of Alzheimer's Care at Highgate Senior Living, located throughout the northwest in Washington, Montana and California, recommends not waiting until you feel old to apply some age-delaying tactics. "There are preliminary steps people of all ages can incorporate into their lives to improve their health and delay the effects of aging," she says. "They are common-sense things, such as diet, exercise, and staying mentally active, that research has proven to be effective in improving both body and mind." These things are highly promoted in many senior living communities.





Four Factors in Maximizing Your Life

1. Go on an age-delaying diet.

That means making sure you eat what's on the menu at many retirement living communities - lots of fresh vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, and omega-3 fatty acids. Eating foods that provide sufficient vitamins and minerals and unsaturated fats can keep your body well nourished and even delay the onset of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and Alzheimer's. According to Sparks, "Inflammation is a noted cause of many age-related diseases, including Alzheimer's, and studies show that dietary omega-3 fatty acids have an anti-inflammatory effect." Omega-3's are found in fish, particularly salmon, flax, and eggs. Before taking any dietary supplements, speak with your doctor.



2. Get off the couch.

Simply taking a brisk walk can do your mind and body good. In addition to improving cardiovascular and muscular fitness, walking can postpone dementia. In fact, research has shown that a brisk 45-minute walk at least three times per week can reduce the risk of dementia or Alzheimer's by 75 percent. Exercising can also help with weight management and joint problems brought on by being overweight, which is why many retirement living communities place great emphasis on their fitness offerings. According to Borboa, "I have been eating three balanced meals a day and haven't gained any weight because I stay active, take the stairs instead of the elevator, and get involved in the outings to parks and other sites of interest." In addition to walking, other beneficial activities offered daily at health clubs and retirement living centers are swimming, stationary cycling, yoga, tai-chi, chair aerobics, and dancing.



3. Exercise your mind.

"We used to believe that brain cells were not regenerated, but new research suggests that the brain can continue to grow when stimulated with new and unique activities," says Sparks. Though music is especially effective in growing new pathways in the brain, any stimulating activity, such as learning a language, knitting, card-playing, or dancing will keep the brain young. Sparks suggests, "Every 10 years, take up a new hobby and learn something new - it will help



reduce your chances of dementia and Alzheimer's." Many retirement communities have daily bingo and bridge games, knitting and crocheting groups, and offer cultural activities, such as weekend plays or musical events. Check the listings of the retirement communities you are considering for a schedule of mentally stimulating activities.

4. Become a social butterfly.

Sparks encourages people to make time for others because in doing so, it also makes time for their health. "People are social animals and need contact. Socializing is another activity that stimulates the brain." She adds, "Isolated people will experience a decline in their health 50 percent faster than people who stay connected." Retirement communities are designed to offer a fun variety of opportunities that make socializing near inevitable. "One of the biggest keys to my quality of life is having the ability to be social, every day," says Borboa. "The one thing I tell people when they move in here is 'You need to do something and get involved. Don't just come to meals ... be social.'"



You cannot avoid turning a year older, but through improving factors in your lifestyle you can slow the aging process and maximize your quality of life. Take these factors into consideration when deciding on the retirement living community that is right for you.

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