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Keys to a Long Life

We know so much more than we used to about aging and staying healthy later in life. Good genetics are only part of the equation. Dr. Roger Landry, author of *Live Long, Die Short*, says 70% of the physical differences and 50% of the intellectual differences between older adults who are healthier in later years and those who aren't boil down to lifestyle choices.

Factors That Determine How Well You Live

What else influences how successfully we age? There are a host of other factors, ranging from how socially connected we are to where we live:

A Life of Purpose

Older adults who are engaged in *meaningful activity and feel a sense of purpose in life* tend to have lower rates of mortality and better health. Volunteering late in life is associated with reduced risk of hypertension, enhanced cognition, delayed physical disabilities and lower mortality rates.

Social Connections

Isolation is a serious health risk for older adults. It contributes to everything from depression to higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. One study found that seniors with strong social networks are less likely to show signs of dementia several years down the road. *Staying connected to family and friends*, even though social media and online chat services such as Skype, yields positive health benefits.

Brain Health

Growing evidence shows a key to overall good health lies in maintaining a healthy brain. Over the last decade, research has proven there's much more to it than working the daily crossword, and that good nutrition, stress management and regular exercise all play key roles in keeping brains healthy. Memory

function in seniors is improved by *regularly doing tasks that require active engagement and that are challenging — like learning a new skill*.

Staying Active

A sedentary lifestyle puts you and your aging family member at risk for chronic diseases. *Engaging in physical activity for 30 to 45 minutes each day* will cut your risks for health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and cancer. People in the Blue Zones, those areas of the world where people live the longest, have active daily lifestyles built around natural movement such as gardening, walking, swimming, hiking and biking.

Feeding the Spirit

Spirituality influences healthy aging. Nourishing the spirit cuts risks from chronic illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes and depression, and people who routinely feed their spirit also have lower rates of suicide. But spirit-feeding doesn't necessarily mean organized religion. Engaging in activities such as *meditation, watercolor painting and gardening*, for example, can all nourish the spirit.



Physical Environment

Where you live influences how well you age. And there are risks to aging in place. A home with poor lighting, a tricky-to-navigate floor plan, bathrooms that aren't senior-friendly and stairs can all increase the risk of falls. And falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for people over 65. Home should also be a place where you can relax and enjoy life, not be bogged down with worry and stress about how you'll manage the details of daily living. Buying groceries. Shoveling snow. Repairing the kitchen sink. Those tasks become more challenging with age and can negatively impact your mental and physical well-being.

Good Nutrition

Seniors are more likely to have poor nutrition than younger adults, especially those seniors who live alone. Problems arranging transportation, difficulty preparing meals and a tighter budget are just a few of the reasons why. But a poor diet can lead to higher incidences of falls, problems with wounds healing, and a weakened immune system that increases the risk for illness and infection.

The good news? *Seniors in their 70s and 80s who modify their behavior today still reap the rewards. It's never too late to make changes and adopting a healthier lifestyle and **choosing the right type of living environment** can impact how well you live ... for as long as you live.*

