

Slice of Advice: The Art of Aging Well

Welcome to our educational series, *Slice of Advice*. Today's topic is **how to age well and maintain a high quality of life as we grow older**.

The reality is that we are all going to age. However, there are steps we can take now—and throughout life—that help us feel better, stay independent longer, and continue enjoying meaningful experiences well into our later years.

Before we begin, remember that these suggestions are general guidance. Always consult your medical professional before making health changes.

For today's discussion, we'll define "senior years" as age 65 and older.

What Does Aging Well Really Mean?

As we age, our goals shift. Instead of focusing on peak performance, the priority becomes **maintenance of quality of life**.

Three key factors support healthy aging:

1. Independence

Maintaining the ability to perform daily tasks yourself—or having the choice to do so—is critical to long-term well-being.

2. Mobility

Being able to move comfortably and complete everyday activities such as standing up, walking, preparing meals, and managing medications supports both safety and confidence.

3. Cognitive Function

Maintaining mental clarity helps you continue engaging with the world and making informed decisions.

Quality of life isn't just about living longer—it's about living well.

Lifestyle Matters More Than Genetics

Many people assume their genetics determine how they age. While genetics do play a role, research on “SuperAgers” shows something important:

Healthy lifestyle habits often have a greater impact on longevity and quality of life than genetics alone.

These habits fall into three broad categories:

Living Conditions

Environmental factors—such as air quality, home safety, and exposure to toxins—affect long-term health. As adults, we gain more control over these conditions and can make improvements where possible.

Economic Stability

Financial resources influence access to healthier food, safe housing, exercise opportunities, and medical care.

Social Interaction

Maintaining strong social connections significantly improves both lifespan and overall well-being. Even simple activities like attending community events or group programs can make a meaningful difference.

Five Habits That Support Healthy Aging

Research consistently highlights five controllable lifestyle factors:

1. Avoid Smoking

If you smoke, consider quitting. If you don't, avoid starting.

2. Limit Alcohol Intake

Moderate alcohol consumption is generally acceptable, but excessive use reduces both lifespan and quality of life.

3. Stay Physically Active

Regular movement is one of the most powerful tools for maintaining independence and preventing chronic disease.

4. Maintain Healthy Sleep Patterns

Sleep supports brain function, recovery, and immune health. Poor sleep increases stress on the body over time.

5. Follow a Nutrient-Dense Diet

Nutrition needs change with age, making balanced food choices increasingly important.

Why Physical Activity Matters Most

Physical activity is one of the strongest predictors of healthy aging. According to the CDC, regular movement can:

- Prevent or delay chronic disease
- Maintain independence and mobility
- Reduce falls and injuries
- Improve recovery time
- Support better sleep

The general recommendation is:

150 minutes of moderate exercise per week

(or about 30 minutes, five days per week)

Strength training twice weekly is also encouraged—especially for:

- legs
- arms
- back muscles

These muscle groups support balance, posture, and everyday movement.

Exercise Doesn't Have to Be Complicated

If 30-minute workouts feel overwhelming, shorter activity sessions can still provide benefits.

Researchers call these “**exercise snacks.**”

Just **two minutes of vigorous activity** can:

- improve sleep
- lower anxiety
- reduce blood pressure
- support long-term heart and brain health

Examples include:

- walking briskly in place
- calf raises while seated
- lifting alternating knees
- rolling heel-to-toe movements
- arm circles or swim strokes
- shoulder rolls
- torso twists

These short movement breaks can be added throughout the day—during commercials, after meals, or between tasks.

Consistency matters more than duration.

It's Never Too Late to Start

Studies show three typical activity patterns:

- inactive individuals experience steady decline in quality of life over time
- lifelong exercisers maintain higher function longer
- people who start exercising later still significantly improve their quality of life

Starting now—at any age—makes a difference.

Exercise Is the Closest Thing to a “Magic Pill”

Regular movement supports:

- better sleep

- improved memory and cognition
- lower dementia risk
- stronger mood and mental health
- reduced chronic disease risk
- fewer falls

Even gentle activities like chair yoga or Tai Chi can provide measurable benefits.

Nutrition Changes With Age

As we grow older:

- nutrient absorption decreases
- appetite often declines
- vitamin needs increase

That makes nutrient-dense foods especially important.

Key nutrients include:

Calcium + Vitamin D

Support bone strength, immune health, and neurological function.

Sources include:

- dairy products
- leafy greens
- fish

Fiber

Supports digestion and nutrient absorption.

Vitamin B12

Important for nerve health and cognitive function.

Supplements may help—but always consult a healthcare provider first.

Final Thought: Start Where You Are

Healthy aging isn't about perfection. It's about small, consistent choices that support independence, mobility, and mental clarity over time.

Whether you begin with short exercise breaks, improved nutrition, better sleep habits, or stronger social connections:

the best time to start is now.