



## Promoting Healthy Aging:

Understanding the Challenges That Prevent  
Optimal Health and Wellness in Seniors

*Read this white paper to learn about the eight dimensions of wellness and the most common challenges aging adults face.*

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# Introduction

If there's one thing that's become increasingly clear in the past year, it's that being "well" requires an intentional focus on more than just your physical health. Even fairly healthy individuals can suffer from the effects of being isolated at home. Mental health awareness came to the forefront as individuals navigated through a challenging 2020 year.

Wellness is the act of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes. Instead of just surviving, you focus on thriving.

Wellness<sup>1</sup> is about living life fully — fueling your body, engaging your mind, and nurturing your spirit — and each part of wellness is interconnected and affects your overall health. As you age, you'll experience a fair number of changes and transitions, from children moving away and retirement to losing friends and unexpected changes in health.

Feeling a sense of loss is normal. But it's important to balance feelings of loss by making sure you have the time to do the things that make you feel happy and fulfilled. To help older adults — and the ones who love them — live their best life in old age, researchers have developed eight dimensions of wellness<sup>2</sup> and tailored them to older adults.<sup>3</sup> In

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1 <https://www.pfizer.com/health-wellness/wellness/what-is-wellness#:~:text=Wellness%20is%20the%20act%20of,how%20it's%20linked%20to%20health>.

2 [https://mfpc.samhsa.gov/ENewsArticles/Article12b\\_2017.aspx](https://mfpc.samhsa.gov/ENewsArticles/Article12b_2017.aspx)

3 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>

contrast to the “[medicalization](#)” of aging,<sup>4</sup> which spreads the notion that aging is a disease that must be treated with medicine, the eight dimensions of wellness offers a [holistic approach](#).<sup>5</sup>

Developmental

Cognitive

Physical

Emotional

Spiritual

Relational

Vocational

Contextual

For example, if an older adult is worried about slipping and falling while getting in and out of the shower (contextual), they might experience anxiety (emotional). This can lead to medical problems (physical) or difficulty participating in volunteer work (vocational). When this happens, they may lose opportunities to interact with others (relational) and might start to question their meaning and purpose (spiritual).

Understanding the eight dimensions of wellness, in addition to common challenges that prevent healthy aging, can positively improve your ability to support those in your life who might need it most. It can help you identify a plan that promotes balance in your life or create greater understanding and allow you to relate to an aging parent on a different level.

In this report, we offer an in-depth look at each dimension of wellness as well as research and statistics from aging and wellness experts on the challenges that older adults face when it comes to aging well in later life.

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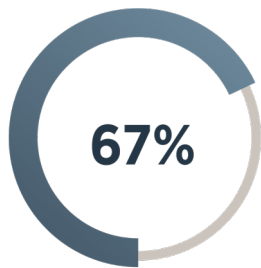
4 <https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1003&context=elders>

5 <https://info.highgateseniorliving.com/guide-to-holistic-healthcare-older-adults-download>

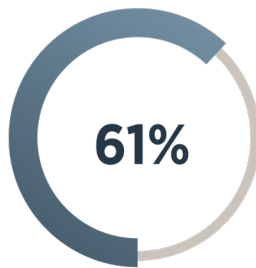
## Developmental

There are many myths about aging, but one of the most pernicious is that aging means declining health and eventual disability.<sup>6</sup> A mindset some older adults fall into is believing that they've already experienced the prime of their lives<sup>7</sup> and that the time after retirement is just one long, steady decline.

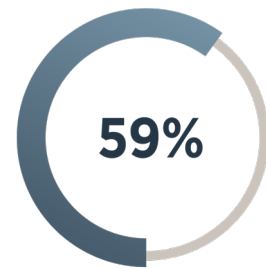
### Top Worries About Aging Among Adults 70+



Losing their memory



Losing their independence



Being in poor health

Source: [West Health Institute/NORC Survey on Aging in America](#)<sup>8</sup>

6 [https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief\\_WestHealth\\_A\\_2017-03\\_DTPv2.pdf](https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief_WestHealth_A_2017-03_DTPv2.pdf)

7 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/3-ways-to-help-an-aging-parent-live-their-best-life-in-old-age>

8 [https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief\\_WestHealth\\_A\\_2017-03\\_DTPv2.pdf](https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief_WestHealth_A_2017-03_DTPv2.pdf)

Some research suggests that merely [expecting physical deterioration](#)<sup>9</sup> increases the likelihood that someone will physically deteriorate. Other research indicates that older adults who have internalized ageism [experience greater prevalence of Alzheimer’s disease symptoms](#).<sup>10</sup>

## Do you feel excited about aging?



Only 20% of adults age 70 and older feel excited about aging.  
The rest feel concerned.

[Source: West Health Institute/NORC Survey on Aging in America](#)<sup>11</sup>

Developmental wellness is [characterized by hopeful and realistic attitudes](#)<sup>12</sup> about the process of growing older. An older person with high levels of developmental wellness is not only realistic about the challenges associated with later life. They are also imaginative about new ways of conceptualizing older adulthood and believe that they are resilient and possess many strengths.

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9 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5406123/>

10 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4853823/>

11 [https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief\\_WestHealth\\_A\\_2017-03\\_DTPv2.pdf](https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief_WestHealth_A_2017-03_DTPv2.pdf)

12 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>

Research has shown that older individuals with more positive self-perceptions of aging [live over seven years longer](#)<sup>13</sup> than those with less positive self-perceptions of aging. This is because older adults who believe that their life has value and is worth investing in are [more likely to engage in preventive health behaviors](#),<sup>14</sup> such as eating a balanced diet, exercising, and following directions for taking prescribed medications.



## +7.5 Years

**Older adults with positive perceptions of aging live longer.**

[Source: Levy BR, Slade MD, Kunkel SR, Kasl SV. Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging. J Pers Soc Psychol. 2002 Aug;83\(2\):261-70. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.83.2.261. PMID: 12150226](#)<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, most older adults [do not expect to age successfully](#).<sup>16</sup>

“ Older people are powering our society as they live longer, healthier lives. Yet most Americans hold deeply negative views about aging — so much so that we go to great lengths to avoid serious conversations about what it means to grow old in a youth-centric society and how we can do so dynamically.

— April Callen, Strategy and Outreach Associate, [FrameWorks Institute](#)<sup>17</sup>

13 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12150226/>

14 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15313104/>

15 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12150226/>

16 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5406123/>

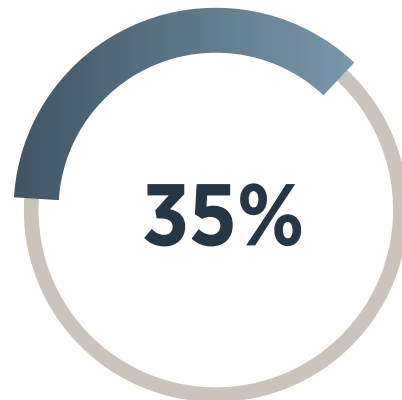
17 <https://publichealth.wustl.edu/attitudes-on-aging/>

## Cognitive

When most people think about cognitive functioning and aging, they think of [Alzheimer's disease](#).<sup>18</sup> Nearly 70% of those in their 70s and older [worry about losing their memory](#),<sup>19</sup> even though [dementia affects 13.9% of the population](#)<sup>20</sup> age 71 and older, and many older adults assume they have very little control of their cognitive functioning.

However, a growing body of research shows that [cognitive decline may not be inevitable or irreversible](#).<sup>21</sup> Both physical exercise and cognitive stimulation appear to be able to reduce, if not reverse, the negative effects of aging on the brain.

### Dementia cases that could be prevented by targeting modifiable risk factors



Source: Kivimäki, M., & Singh-Manoux, A. (2018). [Prevention of dementia by targeting risk factors. The Lancet, 391\(10130\), 1574-1575. doi:10.1016/s0140-6736\(18\)30578-6](#)<sup>22</sup>

18 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/5-things-you-didnt-know-about-alzheimers-disease>

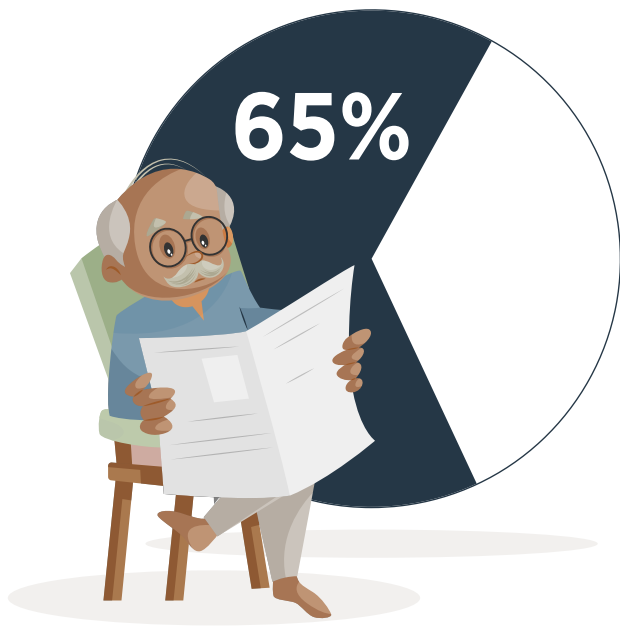
19 [https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief\\_WestHealth\\_A\\_2017-03\\_DTPv2.pdf](https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI-NORC-Aging-Survey/Brief_WestHealth_A_2017-03_DTPv2.pdf)

20 <https://news.umich.edu/one-in-7-americans-over-age-70-has-dementia/>

21 <https://psyarxiv.com/gksdx>

22 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)30578-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)30578-6/fulltext)





**65% of older adults intentionally participate in activities to maintain their cognition. Those who deliberately engage in intellectual activities were found to have lower levels of cognitive impairment.**

Source: Strout KA, Howard EP. The six dimensions of wellness and cognition in aging adults. J Holist Nurs. 2012 Sep;30(3):195-204. doi: 10.1177/0898010112440883. Epub 2012 Jun 19. PMID: 22713605.<sup>23</sup>

Cognitive wellness emphasizes engagement in lifelong learning<sup>24</sup> and confidence in one's ability to participate in activities that promote brain health. An older adult who has levels of cognitive wellness believes they have control over their circumstances and seeks ways to maintain or improve cognition in later life.

Research shows that older adults who engaged their minds for a significant amount of time in any of seven information processing activities (including reading the newspaper, going to museums, and playing puzzle games) had a 47% less chance of developing Alzheimer's disease<sup>25</sup> than did people who did not challenge their minds in this way. Studies also show that lifelong learning provides older adults with skills, confidence, and self-esteem,<sup>26</sup> which not only leads to improved performance in learning a new language or mastering new technologies, for example, but also overcoming daily life challenges.

But not all older adults have this "can-do factor."<sup>27</sup>

23 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22713605/>

24 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>

25 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11851541/>

26 <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1144&context=psych>

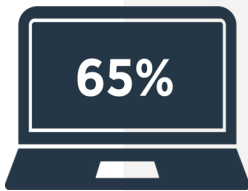
27 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03601270390225631>

## Physical

**W**hen older adults view themselves more negatively because of their age, they may be less likely to engage in preventive health behaviors.<sup>28</sup> Studies indicated that many older adults fear that exercise puts them at risk of falling<sup>29</sup> or that they're too weak or have too many aches and pains to exercise. Yet nearly 10% of deaths per year can be attributed to inactivity.<sup>30</sup>



**60% of older adults report sitting for more than 4 hours per day.**



**65% sit in front of a screen for more than 3 hours daily.**



**55% report watching more than 2 hours of TV.**

Source: Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2013 Dec; 10(12): 6645–6661. Published online 2013 Dec 2. doi: 10.3390/ijerph10126645<sup>31</sup>

28 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15313104/>

29 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1277949/pdf/PCD14A09.pdf>

30 [https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2018/17\\_0354.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2018/17_0354.htm)

31 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3881132>

Less than 5%<sup>32</sup> of older Americans don't meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention physical activity guidelines<sup>33</sup> that call for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity (a fast walking pace) most days of the week. And only about 44% of adults 75 years or older are even physically active.



**67% of older adults are sedentary for at least 8.5 hours each day.**



Source: Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2013 Dec; 10(12): 6645–6661. Published online 2013 Dec 2. doi: [10.3390/ijerph10126645](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10126645)<sup>34</sup>

Physical wellness encompasses one's perception of being physically healthy. This includes diet and exercise behaviors and caring for health.<sup>35</sup> An older adult with high levels of physical wellness perceives that they are caring for their physical well-being.

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32 <https://www.hhs.gov/fitness/resource-center/facts-and-statistics/index.html>

33 <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/exercise.htm>

34 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3881132/>

35 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>

Studies show that [regular exercise builds strength and stamina](#)<sup>36</sup> and improves balance, actually reducing the risk of falling, and getting moving can help manage pain and improve strength and self-confidence. When older adults participate in exercise of sufficient intensity and frequency, research indicates their [risk of functional limitation and disability](#)<sup>37</sup> lowers by up to 50%. Additionally, the number of conditions exercise seems to prevent, ameliorate, or delay — [heart attacks, diabetes, cancer, depression, dementia](#)<sup>38</sup> — grows every year. In fact, seniors over the age of 74 [experience the largest relative gains in survival and healthy life](#)<sup>39</sup> from physical activity.



**As a personal trainer and health educator, I work with older adults more than any other population. One of the challenges I'm often faced with is a lack of interest in starting an exercise program, which is often perplexing since they demonstrate a clear understanding that more activity means better health. What's ironic is that exercising could improve or reverse the conditions that keep older adults from exercising in the first place (i.e., fear of falling, anxiety, depression, poor body competence, etc.).**

— Jena Walther, MS, [National Academy of Sports Medicine](#)<sup>40</sup>

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36 <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/olderad.htm>

37 <https://pmj.bmj.com/content/90/1059/26>

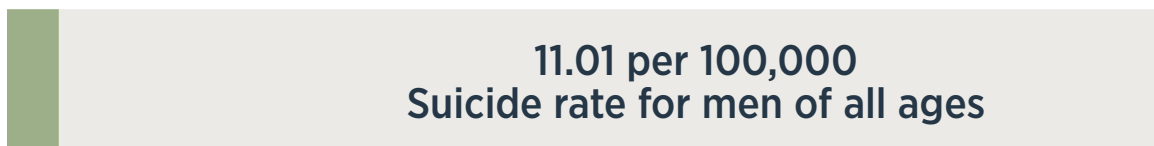
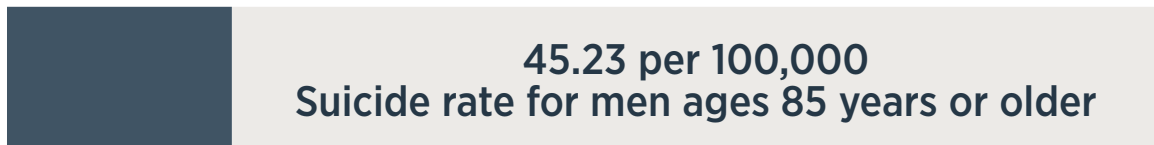
38 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6304477/>

39 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3978479/>

40 [https://blog.nasm.org/uncategorized/are-older-adults-indifferent-scared-and-reluctant-to-exercise#:~:text=Many%20older%20adults%20report%20general,necessary%20to%20exercise%20\(6\).](https://blog.nasm.org/uncategorized/are-older-adults-indifferent-scared-and-reluctant-to-exercise#:~:text=Many%20older%20adults%20report%20general,necessary%20to%20exercise%20(6).)

## Emotional

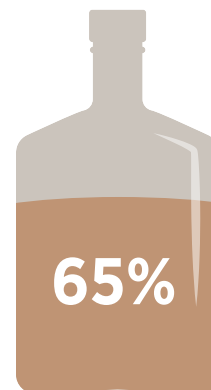
Old age can be seen as a [succession of losses](#),<sup>41</sup> gradual or sudden: stopping work, losing a spouse, becoming ill, failing eyesight. These and other changes often give rise to difficult emotions, such as sadness, anxiety, loneliness, and lowered self-esteem, which in turn lead to social withdrawal and apathy. Many older adults experience depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and risk of suicide.



Source: [The State of Mental Health and Aging in America](#)<sup>42</sup>

**65% of people 65 and older report high-risk drinking.**

Source: [National Institutes on Drug Abuse](#)<sup>43</sup>



41 <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2004-19319-002>

42 [https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/mental\\_health.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/mental_health.pdf)

43 <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/substance-use-in-older-adults-drugfacts>

Studies show that when older adults are dissatisfied with their lives, they are twice as likely to die in the next 10 years.<sup>44</sup> Older people who avoid stressors, rather than dealing with them, are more likely to be depressed and to have late-life drinking problems.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, older adults who identify events as challenging but process and express their emotions are likely to even report some benefit from those events.

Emotional wellness is characterized by an ability to be hopeful about the future and to exhibit resilience when challenges arise.<sup>46</sup> An older adult with high levels of emotional wellness is able to cope with life stress, express their emotions, and feel positive about life.

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44 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3482430/>

45 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1948895/>

46 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>



Research shows that the [combination of being hopeful about aging with the use of coping strategies](#)<sup>47</sup> during older adulthood results in reduced depression and mortality risk, increased quality of life, and improved lifestyle behavior. Coping strategies associated with [high levels of well-being](#)<sup>48</sup> include seeking social support, setting priorities, and acceptance.

But adults age 65 or older are more likely than adults age 50 to 64 to report that they [“rarely” or “never” receive the social and emotional support they need](#).<sup>49</sup>



**Healthy aging rests on the cornerstone of emotional wellness. Living well involves identifying what’s most important to us, making the best of what we need to continue these important life-giving activities, and engaging supports to deal with the rest. But when this goes awry, we can start to feel down or blue. We can worry about the future. We can feel hopeless.**

— Dr. Allison Ilem, PhD, BCBA, [LifeCircles PACE](#)<sup>50</sup>

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47 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0197457216000689>.

48 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03601277.2013.822203>

49 [https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/mental\\_health.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/mental_health.pdf)

50 <https://lifecircles-pace.org/emotional-wellness-and-aging/>

## Spiritual

Spirituality means different things to different people. For many older adults in the U.S., religion has a [major role in their life](#).<sup>51</sup> Their religious community is the largest source of social support outside of the family, and their faith helps them cope with physical health problems and life stresses. For others, spirituality has nothing to do with religion. Rather, it's a connection to something they believe offers hope and support and the sense that life itself has meaning and direction.

Although spirituality can help a person cope with aging, their spiritual well-being may also be challenged by the many social, psychological, and physical losses they're experiencing. Research shows [that the proportion of older people who feel that religion is important to them is falling](#).<sup>52</sup> Without spirituality, older adults are more likely to feel adrift.

Spiritual wellness incorporates a [sense of meaning in life](#),<sup>53</sup> as well as engagement in spiritual or religious activities. An older adult with high levels of spiritual wellness may use religious coping practices, such as attending religious services and prayer, and participate in communities that provide social support. They understand the human need for meaning and purpose and work to develop an appreciation for life and connection with something larger than themselves in the universe.

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51 <https://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/geriatrics/social-issues-in-older-adults/religion-and-spirituality-in-older-adults>

52 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/sep/03/religion.world1>

53 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>



Research shows that older adults who derive a sense of meaning in life from religion<sup>54</sup> tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism. For many, spirituality is an important source of resilience. For example, having a hopeful, positive attitude about the future<sup>55</sup> helps people with physical problems remain motivated to recover. People who use religious coping mechanisms are less likely to develop depression and anxiety than those who do not. These findings suggest that there is a synergistic relationship between spiritual wellness and other domains, such as emotional and relational wellness.



**Women who reported using religious or spiritual coping were 13% less likely to be diagnosed with hypertension.**

Source: Cozier, Y., Yu, J., Wise, L., VanderWeele, T., Balboni, T., Argentieri, M., . . . Shields, A. (n.d.). Religious and Spiritual Coping and Risk of Incident Hypertension in the Black Women's Health Study. Retrieved January 15, 2021, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6230974><sup>56</sup>

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54 <https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/58/3/S160/583377>

55 <https://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/geriatrics/social-issues-in-older-adults/religion-and-spirituality-in-older-adults>

56 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6230974>

## Relational

**A**s people age, it becomes harder, and eventually impossible, to avoid the loss of close relationships. Grieving the loss of a spouse and close friends is a common experience. And serious illness and life stress can also make it more difficult to visit friends as well as to receive support and companionship.

**Nearly 60% of women and 22% of men are likely to be widowed by their mid-70s.**



**59% of men and 42% of women over age 85 report that a close friend had died in the past year.**



Source: Rook KS, Charles ST. Close social ties and health in later life: Strengths and vulnerabilities. *Am Psychol.* 2017;72(6):567-577. doi:10.1037/amp0000104<sup>57</sup>

But human beings are social creatures. Losing this sense of connection and community can change an older person's perception of the world, which, in turn, affects how their mind and body function. Being socially isolated and feeling lonely<sup>58</sup> are related to worse physical and cognitive functioning and earlier mortality. Research has linked social isolation and loneliness<sup>59</sup> to higher risks of high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive decline, and Alzheimer's disease.

Relational wellness captures older adults' need for meaningful relationships<sup>60</sup> with friends, partners, family members, and others. It's not just about socializing. An older adult with high levels of relational wellness has close relationships in which they feel encouraged, accepted, supported, and taken care of. They believe that they have the necessary social resources to navigate the challenges of aging.

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58 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23362501/>

59 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23749730>

60 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>



Research shows that [being socially integrated and having access to social support](#)<sup>61</sup> are related to better physical health, including reduced risks for infectious illness, cardiovascular disease, overall cognitive and physical decline, and both cancer-specific and overall mortality. Findings indicate that experiencing safe and supportive social relationships keeps the body's stress-response system in check, which allows people to learn better, stay healthier, and live longer.

**“ Loneliness acts as a fertilizer for other diseases. The biology of loneliness can accelerate the buildup of plaque in arteries, help cancer cells grow and spread, and promote inflammation in the brain leading to Alzheimer's disease. Loneliness promotes several different types of wear and tear on the body.**

— Steve Cole, PhD, Director of the Social Genomics Core Laboratory at the [University of California, Los Angeles](#)<sup>62</sup>

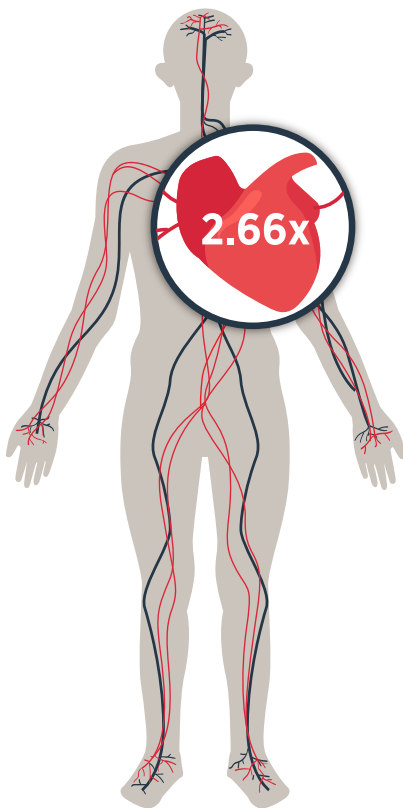
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61 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5599123/>

62 <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks>

## Vocational

There's a reason why the time between the ages of 65 and 80+ is considered to be your "golden years." Typically, older adults have fewer career and family responsibilities, and when coupled with retirement savings and good health, the golden years offer rich possibilities for self-fulfillment and purposeful engagement.



But not all seniors describe this period of adulthood as golden. To some, their daily activities might seem trivial. Others might not have a good sense of what they're trying to accomplish in life. The result isn't just boredom. In a study that followed nearly 7,000 people over age 50 for more than a decade, researchers determined that people were more likely to die at a younger age if they felt their lives had little purpose.<sup>63</sup>

**Those with low life purpose scores are 2.66 times more likely to die from heart, circulatory, and blood conditions.**

Source: Aliya Alimujiang, M. (2019, May 24). Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality Among US Adults Older Than 50 Years. Retrieved January 15, 2021, from <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2734064><sup>64</sup>

63 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2734064>

64 <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2734064>

Vocational wellness is defined by [a sense of meaning and purpose based in life pursuits](#).<sup>65</sup> An older adult with high levels of vocational wellness has found their calling in this chapter of life, whether it's in the form of a continued occupation, part-time work, or volunteering. They have the opportunity to use their strengths or provide resources like time, money, or love to others.

People who engage in meaningful, productive activities have a [greater sense of purpose in life](#),<sup>66</sup> which, [studies show](#),<sup>67</sup> helps maintain their well-being. They are more likely to have slower rates of mental decline, decreased mortality, and increased happiness in old age. In a study of 7,135 older adults, participants who volunteered for 100 or more hours per year experienced a [63% decrease in decline of physical function](#)<sup>68</sup> in contrast with those who did not volunteer.



**What we often lose as we age into older adulthood is not a desire to contribute meaningfully to others but the opportunity to do so. In midlife, we contribute to others partly because it's demanded of us in work and in our social relationships. As we grow older, we have to seek out opportunities to contribute and give to others.**

— Tara Gruenewald, Associate Professor, Chair, Department of Psychology, Crean College of Health and Behavioral Sciences at Chapman University at [Chapman University](#)<sup>69</sup>

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65 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>

66 [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2012-05/rumc-pil050412.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2012-05/rumc-pil050412.php)

67 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25866548/>

68 <https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/73/3/479/4793113>

69 <https://khn.org/news/soul-purpose-seniors-with-strong-reasons-to-live-often-live-stronger/>

## Contextual

Older adults experience many changes to their finances and environment as they age. For example, more than 1 in 5 Americans older than 65 don't drive.<sup>70</sup> But older adults who have entered driving retirement often can't do the things they need and want to do, which often leaves them feeling isolated and frustrated.

In addition to a lack of transportation, many older adults fear falling, so they feel anxious and afraid about leaving their homes. They unintentionally isolate themselves in the place where most falls happen — home. By limiting their activities and social engagements, they're actually increasing their risk of further physical decline, depression, feelings of helplessness<sup>71</sup> — and falls.



**36.2% of all older adults say they are moderately or very afraid of falling.**

Source: Rebecca Boyd, Judy A. Stevens, Falls and fear of falling: burden, beliefs and behaviours, *Age and Ageing*, Volume 38, Issue 4, July 2009, Pages 423–428, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afp053><sup>72</sup>

70 <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-national-poll-inability-to-drive-lack-of-transportation-options-are-major-concerns-for-older-adults-people-with-disabilities-and-caregivers-3-00761774.html>

71 <https://academic.oup.com/ageing/article/37/1/19/25345>

72 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afp053>

Contextual wellness is shaped by perceptions of adequate financial resources, safe and cohesive neighborhoods, and [satisfaction with the overall physical environment and community](#).<sup>73</sup> An older adult with high levels of contextual wellness believes that they have the resources to meet their basic needs and maintain at least some lifestyle preferences.

For example, studies show that older adults who enroll in adult day health centers [experience an increased quality of life](#)<sup>74</sup> thanks to the therapy, physical care, and social activities that are offered in a safe environment tailored to their functional level. Other findings indicate that within assisted living communities, factors such as social relationships with others in the community and food quality were [associated with life satisfaction](#).<sup>75</sup> Essentially, when an older person's living context is supportive, older adults experience a higher sense of life quality.



**Access to transportation is key to support the health and well-being of older adults and ensure their ability to age in place and have a high quality of life in their community. Yet this survey reveals that access to transportation that meets their needs is clearly a major challenge. While local transportation options do exist, older adults and people with disabilities do not know about them or have access to them.**

— Virginia Dize, Co-Director, NADTC and Transportation Program Director,  
[National Association of Area Agencies on Aging](#)<sup>76</sup>

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73 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/jcad.12236>

74 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3119386/>

75 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6427049\\_The\\_Salience\\_of\\_Social\\_Relationships\\_for\\_Resident\\_Well-Being\\_in\\_Assisted\\_Living](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6427049_The_Salience_of_Social_Relationships_for_Resident_Well-Being_in_Assisted_Living)

76 <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-national-poll-inability-to-drive-lack-of-transportation-options-are-major-concerns-for-older-adults-people-with-disabilities-and-caregivers-3-00761774.html>



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## Conclusion

**H**ealthy aging requires a holistic approach. Establishing new, better habits that support your wellness goals can be challenging, but it's worth it. Developing healthier routines and habits can lead to positive feelings (emotional), supportive relationships (relational), increased energy (physical), and a feeling that you're using your talents, skills, and abilities to engage in life (vocational, cognitive, spiritual).

Each individual's path will be a bit different. The goal of your overall wellness is to strive for harmony, not necessarily to be equally balanced in all dimensions. As you set goals to achieve holistic wellness, incorporate your own priorities, approaches, and aspirations. What does it mean to you to live life to the fullest?



*This white paper is brought to you by Highgate Senior Living, an industry-leading assisted living and memory care provider offering a holistic approach to care. Pioneering change in the senior living industry, Highgate is committed to creating a unique and desirable living option where each resident can live a life of purpose.*

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