

All About Aging

by Maija Sanna, M.D.

Maintaining Independence in Your Golden Years

These are only general tips. Your doctor will have other recommendations tailored to your specific situation. Independence Day only happens once a year, but you can work on your independence year-round! Be well.

For many seniors, however, independence means a different type of freedom – *from relying on others for assistance* – and maintaining it throughout their golden years is a priority.

My patients often ask, “How do I keep my independence?” It’s a good question and one worth exploring in this column. Below are some general health tips to help maintain independence.

Stay active. I mean both physically and mentally. The best way to stay fit at any age is to keep moving! Daily physical activity for 20-30 minutes should be your norm. Mental activities are equally important. Do what you enjoy the most and you will stick with it, whether it’s reading books, doing crossword puzzles, taking classes or learning new skills.

Stay social. Maintaining your indepen-

dence is easier when you have a wide network of friends and family. Senior centers are a great resource to help you network with others who have similar interests. Being independent does NOT mean being alone. Friends keep us young – *and water our plants when we leave town!*

Volunteer. Volunteering offers numerous benefits, including the above tips of staying active and social! Helping others also helps you feel better about yourself and adds to your well-being. Often, older adults have unique skills and insights that can benefit others. It’s a win-win situation.

See your doctor. He or she is your partner in good health and will make sure you have age-appropriate health screenings and vaccines to stay healthy.

Take your medicine. Taking medications as prescribed is important. If you



are having difficulty with any of your medications, discuss your concerns with your doctor. There may be another medication or treatment plan that works better for you.

Manage stress. Life can be stressful and getting appropriate stress relief is just as important now as when you were younger. The first two tips above can be helpful here as well.

Get help. Although it seems counterintuitive, this tip is an important one. Frequently, maintaining one’s independence means accepting some help, whether it’s hiring a driver or a full-time caregiver. Life changes may require difficult adjustments, but it’s important to recognize that they are designed to keep you functioning as independently, yet safely, as possible.



Things to remember

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