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## Understanding Senior Moments

*What's normal, what's not, and smart hacks to bolster cognition and memory.*

**F**orgetting where you left your car keys, struggling to recall someone's name, or walking into a room and forgetting why you went there in the first place are common examples of "senior moments." In most cases, these momentary memory slips are harmless.

"The occasionally forgetting a word or a name, while common at all ages, is even more common with cognitive aging," says Alejandra Sánchez López, MD, Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Neurology & Division of Geriatric Medicine, UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. "The key is that these episodes should be occasional, not affect the ability of someone's speech, and do not become increasingly worse."

### Common Cognitive Changes

Working memory tends to be less efficient as we age. This type of memory enables you to temporarily hold information in your mind while it is processed or used. An example of working memory is when you are given a phone number, and you repeat it to yourself until you have a chance to write it down. During this time, your working memory is actively holding that information, so it doesn't fade away. This is different from long-term memory, in which the information would be stored more permanently.

In addition to changes in memory, we are less efficient at multitasking as we age. "People think that when we are multitasking, we are doing many things at the same time," says Dr. Sánchez. "But actually, our attention must switch back and forth from one thing to the other. This is called divided attention, and this becomes much more difficult with age."

### Smart Memory Hacks

While we can't stop the clock, there are strategies to help manage and mitigate cognitive changes. Dr. Sánchez recommends avoiding multitasking and distractions. In other words, focus on the task at hand, including conver-



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*Contrary to prior belief, the brain remains flexible and can successfully take on new challenges throughout life.*

sations. Whether on the phone or in person, give your full attention to the conversation. Don't converse and check emails, or talk in depth and drive. Distracted driving leads to thousands of avoidable deaths each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. It can seem so harmless to chat while in traffic...until it isn't.

Recalling words can be another frustrating and common occurrence. "If you cannot think of the word you want to say, try to use a word that is somewhat similar or describe what you want to say," recommends Dr. Sánchez. It also can help to visualize a picture for the word you seek.

Remembering appointments, plans, and grocery lists can be challenging, especially when juggling multiple responsibilities. Fortunately, there are many tools to help you manage.

**Set an alert.** Utilize the calendar app on your smartphone to set reminders for appointments and plans. You can set alerts a few hours or weeks in advance.

**Write it down.** The physical act of writing helps many people remember lists and plans, so use a paper calendar planner.

**Snap a digital photo.** Instead of trying to remember everything you need at the grocery store, keep an ongoing list on a white board in the kitchen.

*Continued on page 7*

HEALTHY  
Years

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## NEWS BRIEF



## Hearing Aids Extend Longevity

A recent study featured in *The Lancet Healthy Longevity* suggests that wearing hearing aids can be crucial for those who need them but aren't using them. Lead researcher Janet Choi, MD, MPH, an otolaryngologist at Keck Medicine, reveals that adults with hearing loss who consistently wear hearing aids lower their mortality risk up to 24% compared with non-users. The research highlights the potential protective role of hearing aids in enhancing overall health and prolonging life, especially considering previous studies indicating that untreated hearing loss can lead to reduced life spans, social isolation, depression, and dementia. The researchers used data analyzed from almost 10,000 adults 20 years and older who had completed audiometry evaluations, a test used to measure hearing ability, and who filled out questionnaires about their hearing aid use. Over a 10-year follow-up period, researchers found that regular hearing aid users (defined as those wearing aids at least once a week for five hours or more) consistently showed a 25% lower risk of death, regardless of variables like the severity of hearing loss, age, ethnicity, income, education, or medical history. In contrast, occasional hearing aid users didn't show any significant life-extending benefits. While the study didn't delve into the reasons behind this effect, it aligns with recent research linking hearing aid use to reduced levels of depression and dementia. Researchers theorize that the improvements in mental health and cognition that come with improved hearing can promote better overall health, which may improve life span.

## Personal Beliefs About Drugs Influence Brain Activity

Research from the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai revealed that human beliefs can modulate brain activity in a dose-dependent manner, akin to drugs. The study, which specifically examined beliefs about nicotine, carries implications ranging from understanding addiction's neural mechanisms to enhancing treatment strategies by harnessing the power of beliefs. For the study, nicotine-dependent participants believed that an electronic cigarette they were about to vape contained either low, medium, or high strengths of nicotine, when in fact the level remained constant. Functional neuroimaging showed that the thalamus, a key nicotine-binding site in the brain, responded in a dose-dependent manner relative to the participants' beliefs about nicotine strength. According to the researchers, this suggests that subjective beliefs could be targeted for substance use disorder treatment, and may enhance responses to pharmacological treatments for health disorders. The researchers plan next to study how drug potency interacts with drug-related beliefs about cannabis, alcohol, antidepressants, and psychedelics. The study was published in *Nature Mental Health*.

## Morning Exercise Better for Weight Loss

Exercising in the morning may lead to greater weight loss compared with exercising later in the day. Research published in the journal *Obesity* indicates that moderate-to-vigorous exercise between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. may lead to a lower waist circumference and body mass index (BMI) compared with midday or evening workouts. BMI is a numerical value calculated from an individual's height and weight. Moderate-intensity activities are those that noticeably increase your heart rate and breathing rate but still allow you to maintain a conversation. During vigorous exercise, it becomes difficult to carry on a conversation due to the increased exertion. The researchers based their conclusion on analyzed data from 5,285 participants in the 2003-2006 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Those who exercised in the morning (7 a.m. to 9 a.m.) had an average BMI of 27.5, while midday and evening exercisers had an average BMI of 28.3. Waist circumference results followed a similar trend. Morning exercisers may benefit from their bodies relying on stored fat for energy due to fasting overnight, potentially enhancing fat burning during and after exercise. Greater weight loss can also result from doing exercise that's more concentrated or structured, which is another pattern researchers found among the morning group. ■

# Natural Ways to Ease Heartburn

*From deep breathing to simple lifestyle adjustments, these tips can help quell the fire.*

**D**espite its name, heartburn has nothing to do with the heart; it's a digestive issue. Heartburn is primarily caused by acid reflux, a condition in which stomach acid flows back into the esophagus—the tube that connects the mouth to the stomach. This happens when the lower esophageal sphincter, a ring of muscle at the entrance of the stomach, doesn't close properly or relaxes abnormally, allowing stomach acid to move up into the esophagus.

Occasional heartburn usually responds to over-the-counter antacids, which neutralize stomach acid (e.g., Tums, Rolaids, and Maalox). Frequent heartburn sufferers may need drugs such as H2 blockers or proton pump inhibitors (PPIs), which reduce how much acid your stomach makes. Although PPIs are generally considered safe, researchers have identified potential risks associated with them, especially when using them longterm.

There are, however, some natural solutions that can work quite quickly, cost little to nothing to try and have been found to be effective in many people.

## The Benefits of Slow Deep Breaths

Suzanne Smith is an integrative nurse practitioner in the UCLA Integrative Digestive Health and Wellness program. She teaches her patients how to tap into the benefits of deep breathing. The calming effect is virtually instantaneous, which is why she finds diaphragmatic breathing such a valuable tool for people who have gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), or abdominal bloating and distention.

“When we take deep diaphragmatic breaths, it calms the body and the diaphragmatic movement also creates a kind of anti-reflux action that can help relieve GERD symptoms,

which can be especially helpful to people who are not responding to PPIs.”

The technique isn't necessarily a replacement for medications, though in some cases it might be. When used skillfully, the breathing practice can do more than just relieve GI distress; it may prevent it in some people. For example, Smith recommends taking a few deep slow breaths before and after meals to aid digestion.

## Adjust Eating Habits

It can be easy to overeat, especially if you fill up large dinner plates and have tempting platters of food on the table during meals. Large meals can increase stomach pressure, leading to heartburn. Use smaller food plates and keep serving platters away from the dinner table. You can also try eating smaller, more frequent meals to reduce the risk of overloading your belly at one sitting.

Understanding your trigger foods and avoiding them can stop heartburn before it even starts. Common triggers include spicy foods, tomatoes, citrus fruits, garlic, onions, chocolate, coffee, caffeine, alcoholic beverages, and fatty or fried foods. Also know that smoking and alcohol both can irritate the lining of the esophagus and can exacerbate heartburn symptoms. It's best to quit smoking and limit alcohol consumption to ease heartburn.

Most people realize that eating before bed is not wise for the waistline, but it's also a heartburn trigger. Avoid lying down after eating, and try to eat your last meal at least two to three hours before going to bed.

## Lifestyle Modifications

Excess weight can put pressure on your abdomen, pushing up your stomach and causing acid to reflux into your esophagus. Maintaining a



© Milan Markovic | Getty Images

*Deep meditative breathing helps calm the nervous system and facilitates the digestive process.*

healthy weight, therefore, can reduce that from happening. Tight belts and other snug clothing can similarly squeeze your stomach and push acid up into your esophagus.

When you eat, take your time. Eating slowly and chewing thoroughly can help prevent overeating and reduce heartburn symptoms. Stress and anxiety also can worsen heartburn symptoms.

“Sometimes people don't have a positive relationship with food, and they may have some anxiety that's not always conscious,” Smith adds. “In such cases, the body might see food as a threat instead of a positive element. This can trigger the stress response and GI upset.” Practices like tai chi, yoga, and deep breathing can help manage stress.

Exercise in general can be helpful. A study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* reported that getting at least 30 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous exercise can be particularly effective in reducing acid reflux. Exercise boosts activity in the digestive tract, so it may help clear stomach acid that causes heartburn symptoms.

## When to See Your Doctor

If you frequently experience heartburn (twice a week or more) or if your symptoms are severe, it's important to consult with a health-care professional. Chronic heartburn can be a symptom of GERD, which can lead to more serious problems, including inflammation of the esophagus, esophageal ulcers, or Barrett's esophagus, which can increase the risk of esophageal cancer. ■



# Fortifying Your Muscles and Bones

*These strategies can help you build and maintain strength where you need it most.*

**M**aking smarter dietary choice becomes ever more important as we age because the body becomes less tolerant of junk food and less efficient at absorbing vital nutrients. Of course, we need regular exercise for bone and muscle health, but nutrition must accompany physical activity for the best outcomes. Whether you are vegetarian, love the occasional slice of prosciutto, enjoy fish, or want to keep it vegan, there are nutrient-rich dietary choices that can please most everyone. It's about knowing what fuels and protects, and what can get in the way of your efforts to maintain good health.

## Protein Essentials

Protein is vital for just about everything the body does. Protein builds, maintains, and repairs muscle, bone, and skin, and it helps make enzymes, hormones, and neurotransmitters. According to UCLA senior dietitian supervisor Dana Hunnes, PhD, MPH, RD, healthy older adults (without kidney issues) should aim for approximately 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. A pound is equal to 0.45 kilograms. To simply convert pounds to kilos, multiply pounds by .45. For example, here is the math for a 150-pound person:  $150 \times .45 = 67.5$  kilograms. Once you know your weight in kilograms, multiply that by 1.2 grams to get your recommended daily intake of protein in grams. For a 150-person that is  $67.5 \times 1.2 = 81$  grams of protein per day. It's a good idea to spread your protein intake among your meals and snacks throughout the day (see the sidebar on page 5 for meal/snack plan ideas).



*Seeds are tiny nutritional powerhouses, and many are high in calcium and protein, including hemp, pumpkin, poppy, sesame, flax, and chia seeds.*

## Choose Wisely

The type of protein you choose matters. It's best to limit or eliminate red meat, cured meats, processed meats such as sausage, bacon, and beef jerky, and full-fat dairy. Of course, there is room for occasionally enjoying such foods. The key is occasionally. Healthy daily choices of protein include plant-based options like legumes, beans, tofu, and tempeh and lean meats, poultry, fish, and dairy. Salmon, trout, and sardines are particularly high in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, which they themselves get from eating smaller fish and algae. DHA is a type of omega-3 fatty acid found in algae that fish eat and is known to help brain health. It benefits cognition and protects against neurodegeneration.

Including plant-based proteins in your diet also has some key advantages. "When we eat high amounts of animal proteins, they can actually make our blood a little more acidic, and that can remove calcium from our bones," explains Hunnes.

"Plant proteins do not make our blood more acidic. In addition to the protein from plant-based foods, you often also get fiber, which older adults can struggle to get enough of." Fiber helps reduce cholesterol and aids digestion and bowel movements.

## Eat Enough Daily

In addition to paying attention to protein, be sure you eat enough every day. "As we age, our taste buds change and sometimes we have difficulty tasting, as does our sense of smell, making it, at times, challenging to eat enough," says Hunnes. "It's important to eat ample calories for your specific activity level." A healthy older adult generally needs around 25 calories per kilogram of body weight daily to maintain weight and muscle mass. More active individuals may require more calories and a slightly higher protein intake.

## Nutrients for Bone Health

Strong bones help us remain physically active and independent as we age. Many minerals found in your body are contained in your bones. In general, the denser this network of minerals is, the stronger your bones are and the more protection you have against fractures. Physically active people generally have greater bone mass than those who are sedentary. But bone mass also is affected by nutrition. If you don't get enough through the foods you eat, your body pulls minerals from your bones.

Key nutrients for bone health include calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin K. Your body synthesizes vitamin D from sun exposure, in general about 15 minutes per day of sun should do it, but talk to your primary care or dermatologist for personal recommendations. Few foods are naturally rich in vitamin D<sub>3</sub>. The best sources are the fatty fish and fish liver oils, though check with your doctor before taking

fish-liver oil, as it can interact with certain medications (including blood thinners). Smaller amounts of vitamin D are found in egg yolks, and cheese. Some mushrooms contain vitamin D<sub>2</sub> due to intentionally being exposed to high amounts of ultraviolet light. Many foods are fortified with vitamin D, such as non-dairy milks and yogurts, dairy products, and cereals. Foods high in vitamin K include leafy greens, broccoli, and chicken; however, discuss with your doctor or dietitian if you're on medications before suddenly increasing your intake of vitamin-K containing foods.

While dairy products are often cited as good sources of calcium, you can also get it from broccoli, kale, almonds, and calcium-fortified non-dairy beverages and foods such as non-dairy yogurt, orange juice, and tofu. Here are a few examples: One cup of cooked kale offers around 90 milligrams (mg) of calcium, a cup of cooked collard greens contains approximately 266 mg of calcium, a 3-ounce serving of canned sardines (with bones) contains about 325 mg of calcium, and one ounce of almonds provides approximately 76 mg of calcium. Tofu can be an excellent source of calcium, with roughly 250 to 750 mg per half-cup, depending on the brand and preparation.

When it comes to bone health, there is also something to stay away from—sodas.

"It's important to avoid sodas because they are often carbonated, which can make our blood more acidic, and they also often contain phosphoric acid (especially dark colas), which can leach calcium from our bones," advises Hunnes. "It's best to opt for water as your primary beverage choice."

### Simplifying Meal Prep

Hunnes highly recommends batch cooking because it can simplify meal preparation. "By making larger quantities of food at once, you save time and effort in the long run,"

she says. "Look for recipes with five to 10 easily accessible ingredients, including frozen options like peas or edamame, and fresh produce that requires minimal processing." For example, a simple Indian curry with onions, garlic, potatoes, frozen peas, canned tomatoes, and a few spices can be prepared in large batches and frozen for future meals.

Healthy snacks don't need to be complicated to be delicious and beneficial. Enjoy baby carrots with hummus or slices of apple with almond or peanut butter. Keep these items stocked and easily accessible so when you're craving something crunchy, you see it as soon as you open the refrigerator door.

Optimizing muscle strength and preserving bone through nutrition is a crucial aspect of aging gracefully and maintaining overall health. Prioritizing sufficient calorie and protein intake, especially from plant-based proteins, while avoiding acidic beverages like soda, can go a long way to achieving these goals. Batch cooking and simple, nutritious snacks can make healthy eating easier to achieve. While supplements may seem tempting, it is advisable to consult a dietitian for personalized guidance (see page 8), as they are the experts in food and nutrition therapy, capable of addressing a wide range of dietary needs and challenges. ■

## SMART FOOD PLANS FOR BONES, MUSCLES, AND GENERAL HEALTH

While we call out protein in numeric terms, these foods also contain other vital nutrients for muscle and bone health, such as calcium (e.g., leafy greens, dairy) and vitamin K (leafy greens, chicken). Enjoy!

### BREAKFAST (Approx. 15–20 grams of protein)

- Scrambled eggs (2 large eggs): 12 grams of protein
- Greek or plant-based Greek yogurt (6 ounces): 15 grams of protein
- **Total: 27 grams of protein**

### LUNCH (Approx. 15–20 grams of protein)

- Grilled tofu or chicken breast (4 ounces): 25 grams of protein
- Quinoa (½ cup cooked): 4 grams of protein
- Mixed vegetables: 5 grams of protein
- **Total: 34 grams of protein**

### AFTERNOON SNACK (Approx. 10–15 grams of protein)

- Cottage cheese (½ cup): 14 grams of protein
- Almonds (1 ounce): 6 grams of protein
- **Total: 20 grams of protein**

### DINNER (Approx. 15–20 grams of protein)

- Tempeh or baked salmon (4 ounces): 23 grams of protein
- Steamed broccoli: 3 grams of protein
- Quinoa (½ cup cooked): 4 grams of protein
- **Total: 30 grams of protein**

### EVENING SNACK

(Approx. 5–10 grams of protein)

- A small serving of hummus (2–3 ounces): 7 grams of protein
- **Total: 7 grams of protein**

Breakfast: © Arx0nt; Lunch: © KucherAV; Dinner: © Mike Kemp | Getty Images



# Do You Have Pain During Sexual Intercourse?

*Vaginal atrophy could be the reason. There are simple solutions that work rather quickly and offer multiple benefits.*

**F**or many women, what was once an enjoyable and pain-free sexual experience can suddenly become uncomfortable and quite painful. This unwelcome shift can be caused by vaginal atrophy, also known as genitourinary syndrome of menopause, which is a consequence of decreasing estrogen levels. About 50% of women experience postmenopausal vaginal atrophy, yet many suffer in silence. Fortunately, there are numerous effective treatment options.

## Symptoms and Treatment Options

Estrogen plays a crucial role in maintaining the health of the vaginal lining. As it declines vaginal tissues can become less elastic, thinner, and inflamed. That typically leads to one or more of the following symptoms:

- vaginal dryness
- vaginal itching or burning
- pain or discomfort during sexual intercourse
- vaginal bleeding after intercourse
- more frequent urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- urinary symptoms like increased urgency or frequency
- vaginal odor and yellow discharge.

“Treatment options available to manage these symptoms include vaginal estrogen or vaginal DHEA available by prescription or non-hormonal products such as lubricants and moisturizers available over the counter (OTC). Especially useful are suppositories containing hyaluronic acid. If indicated an oral selective estrogen receptor modulator can be prescribed; or if other menopausal symptoms are bothersome, hormonal therapy consisting

of an estrogen patch, gel or pill combined with progesterone, if you have a uterus,” says Andrea Rapkin, MD, obstetrician-gynecologist, and director of the UCLA Pelvic Pain Clinic and provider in the UCLA Menopause program.

## Initial Options

A good place to start is with OTC options. But if they don't provide adequate relief, have a conversation with your gynecologist. A pelvic exam can quickly discern if vaginal atrophy is causing your symptoms. If so, your physician may recommend vaginal estrogen or DHEA, which is effective for many women. DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) is a naturally occurring hormone produced by the adrenal glands to make estrogen and testosterone. DHEA and estrogen treatments help preserve the thickness of the vaginal lining, keep the tissue flexible, and help maintain vaginal moisture and ability to lubricate. When the estrogen is very low dose and inserted directly into the vagina, you avoid the potential complications from systemic (oral or transdermal like a patch or gel) estrogen replacement.

“Vaginal estrogen will take about two months to see a major effect and will continue to improve over the next 18 months,” explains Dr. Rapkin. “Women can use this over their lifetime. If they're using it for sexual comfort, it can be used as long as one is sexually active.”

## Vaginal Estrogen Treatment Forms

Each form of delivery has unique advantages and considerations.

**Vaginal estrogen cream** is a topical application that is inserted



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*Many women experience painful sex after menopause. Don't suffer in silence. There are many possible solutions.*

directly into the vagina, using an applicator. It is typically used daily for the first two weeks, followed by a maintenance dose (e.g., one to three times per week). Creams can be messy and leak out, especially when used immediately before sexual activity.

**Vaginal estrogen pills** are inserted into the vagina usually with an applicator. They dissolve gradually, releasing estrogen over time. Like creams, they are typically used once daily for 14 days, and then the frequency will be reduced to a maintenance dose, generally twice weekly. Unlike creams, there's no mess, and pills do not usually result in excess leakage.

**A low-dose vaginal estrogen ring** is a flexible, soft ring that is easily inserted into the vagina by the user. It releases a consistent low dose of estrogen over time. Rings are replaced every three months. They require less frequent maintenance compared with creams or pills and don't generally result in any significant discharge.

The choice depends on your preferences, lifestyle, and the severity of symptoms and insurance coverage. Some women may find creams or pills convenient enough, while others may prefer the low-maintenance approach of a vaginal ring.

## The Benefits of Vaginal Estrogen

Vaginal estrogen helps strengthen the tissues in the urethra, bladder, and vagina. It also can relieve another problem caused by vaginal atrophy. “Some women develop a



yellow discharge and odor called atrophic vaginitis caused by overgrowth of bacteria in the vagina other than the normal lactobacillus bacteria. Vaginal estrogen or vaginal DHEA will treat this,” says Dr. Rapkin.

Because vaginal estrogen helps maintain the normal acidic pH of the vagina, which can discourage the growth of harmful bacteria and promote the growth of lactobacilli, this treatment also can reduce the risk of UTIs.

It’s important to use vaginal estrogen as prescribed and to be aware of possible side effects. “Using much more than what is prescribed can stimulate the uterine lining (endometrium) and cause bleeding or abnormal growth of



*Vaginal estrogen and DHEA help many women return to a healthy, happy sex life.*

the endometrium,” warns Dr. Rapkin. “At the beginning when tissue is very thin there can be a small amount of systemic absorption leading to headache or breast pain; however, after a few months these symptoms generally resolve.” Unfortunately, this low dose of estrogen

vaginally will not help other systemic menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes.

While the therapy does not significantly affect estrogen levels in the bloodstream, women on aromatase inhibitors for breast cancer are generally told not to use vaginal estrogen or DHEA.

Vaginal estrogen therapy offers relief from the uncomfortable symptoms of vaginal atrophy, improving vaginal health and overall well-being. Many women find that this simple solution returns to them the pleasure of sexual intercourse and partner intimacy. To determine the most suitable treatment option and to receive guidance and support throughout your treatment process, consult with your gynecologist. ■

## Memory—cont. from page 1

**When you’re ready to shop,** snap a picture of the list with your smart phone.

**Stay organized with routine check-ins.** For example, make it a habit to check your calendar each morning to refresh your memory about the day’s plans. Or, before bedtime, review your to-do list for the next day.

## Normal Brain Aging vs. Cognitive Decline

Occasional forgetfulness is usually nothing to worry about. However, if memory loss becomes pervasive and begins to interfere with daily life—such as getting lost in familiar places, having trouble following instructions, or repeating the same questions—it could be a sign of a serious issue and should be evaluated by a healthcare professional.

The idea of a cognitive evaluation might be scary, but it’s a beneficial reality check. “As part of the work-up we evaluate for potential culprits of cognitive problems, for example thyroid disorders, vitamin B12 deficiency or medications that can potentially affect cognition,” explains Dr. Sánchez. “Early detection of cognitive

impairment decline disorders, such as Alzheimer’s, can lead to implementation of medical and lifestyle interventions that may be able to delay the progression of the disease.”

Another key point is that an accurate and timely diagnosis also facilitates important decisions to be discussed with loved ones. It allows people to plan and discuss care preferences as early as possible and to draw up any needed legal documents, such as those for power of attorney, healthcare proxy, wills, and trusts.

## Good for the Brain and Body

Regular physical exercise increases blood flow to the brain and the whole body, a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and omega-3 fatty acids benefits the body and brain, and good-quality sleep plays a critical role in consolidating memories and supports general wellbeing, too.

Keeping your brain engaged throughout life helps you stay sharp. Take classes to learn something new, or sign up for a course specifically designed to bolster memory. Many medical centers nationwide offer brain training programs. The UCLA Longevity Center offers a variety of programs; some are available

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

*Brief and occasional memory lapses are generally harmless. You can bolster your memory if you:*

- ▶ **Focus** your attention on one task at a time.
- ▶ **Keep** a paper log and/or digital calendar for appointments and tasks.
- ▶ **Review** to-do lists and calendars at regular times.
- ▶ **Take** classes of interest.
- ▶ **Sign** up for a brain training course.

online (<https://www.semel.ucla.edu/longevity>).

It’s also valuable to highlight some of the positive changes that occur with aging. People often have greater insight and less emotional reactivity. Studies have shown that many people report greater quality of life as well as happiness in their senior years compared with middle age.

For most people, senior moments are just a common, sometimes humorous part of aging. If, however, you or a loved one experience frequent or increasingly severe memory lapses, consult with a healthcare provider as soon as possible. ■



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**Q** *I am starting to avoid night driving because it's becoming harder to see. Is there anything I can do to improve my ability to drive at night?*

**A** Many people struggle with nighttime driving, so you are far from alone. And you're wise to look for options and solutions for night driving. The National Safety Council reports that while we do only one-quarter of our driving at night, 50% of traffic fatalities occur at night. Factors involved in nighttime crashes include fatigue, alcohol, and poor vision. Obviously, try to be well rested and alert while driving at night, and avoid driving under the influence. Alcohol slows reaction time, and advanced age does, too. When it comes to vision, our eyes have two types of photoreceptors: rods and cones. Cones allow us to see color and are active at higher light levels, such as during the day. Rods are responsible for vision at low light levels. As we age, we lose the function of rods more than cones. This is why we may see fine during the day, but we struggle as night falls. In addition, the muscles that control the size of the pupil become less efficient with age. This leads to a smaller maximum pupil size, which limits the amount of light that can enter the eye. Cataracts can cause clouding of the eye's lens, reducing the amount of light that reaches the retina. Seeing an eye doctor regularly can catch vision problems, such as the need for cataract surgery, and update any prescription eyewear if needed.

Lights from oncoming traffic can be a real problem, especially for people with cataracts. Antiglare glasses can sometimes help. There are basic car details to pay attention to as well. Be sure the windows are clean inside and out, and that your headlights are clean. Check the beam of your headlights to make sure it's properly aligned. Bright screens inside the car from monitors and dashboards make it harder to see outside. You can usually dim these. If you have a newer car, use any available advanced driver assistance features such as adaptive headlights,

lane-keeping assistance, and automatic emergency braking. Finally, consider taking a driver refresher course for older adults. These are offered through AARP and some insurance companies. In addition to bolstering driving skills and confidence overall, passing these courses can sometime reduce your car insurance bill.

— **SUSAN LEONARD, MD**, Geriatric Medicine  
UCLA Healthy Years Editor-in-Chief

**Q** *I'm not sure I am getting all the nutrients I need. Should I take supplements?*

**A** Many people consider taking supplements, such as for bone and muscle health, but recent research suggests that isolated supplements may not provide significant benefits and can even have adverse effects. For example, if you take calcium supplements, it might affect your heart health or colon health. So, before you take supplements, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about your health conditions and any medications you're taking. Also, we are not meant to get nutrients in isolation. We are meant to get them holistically through food. There is a synergistic effect that occurs among the compounds within a food to provide you with optimum nutritional value.

If you are struggling with your diet or have specific nutritional concerns, a registered dietitian can be a very valuable resource. Dietitians are experts in food and nutrition therapy for health and have extensive education and clinical training. We can help with personalized meal planning within the context of your unique nutritional needs. We also collaborate with medical providers to address health concerns. Not all dietitians are created equal, so it is important to find one who understands your specific health needs and has knowledge about food and medication interactions. Dietitians who can take care of the sickest of the sick, such as myself, also can help healthier individuals who just want little tweaks or even major overhauls in their diet.

— **DANA ELLIS HUNNES**, UCLA Senior Dietitian  
Supervisor, Adjunct Assistant Professor

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