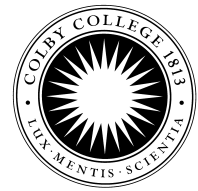


# Promoting Healthy (Mental) Aging 1: Physical and Cognitive Activity

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Supported by Goldfarb Center Collaborative Research Grant 01.2450

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of some of the behaviors we can engage in at any point of our life to enhance the aging process.

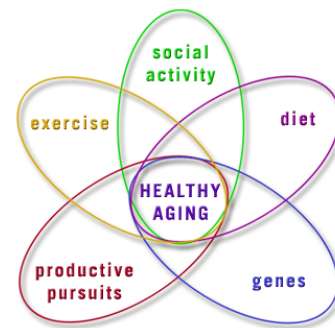
**Some Statistics:** Individuals over 60 comprise the fastest growing demographic and in the US, the Baby Boomer generation is now turning 65. Due to improvements in medical treatments, older adults can expect to live longer than ever before. Two key concerns are the extent to which they will be able to live independently and the personal and societal burden of caring for an aging population.



Maintaining healthy cognition (memory, attention, language, and decision making skills) is necessary for maintaining independence. Aging is determined by both genetic (what we are born with) and behavioral (what we can do) factors.

## Normal Aging

- As we age, some processes show normal declines due to the aging of the underlying neurological systems
  - We get slower
  - Memory declines
- Environmental or health factors can precipitate the decline
  - Stroke, cardiovascular health, diabetes
  - Unhealthy living
- The goals of interventions are to
  1. Enhance cognitive functions
  2. Delay declines and dementia
  3. Maintain independence



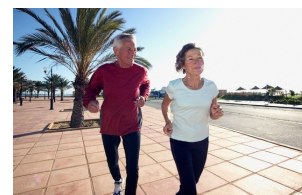
## Negative Influences on Aging

1. Physical factors (poor health, stroke, smoking, etc.)
2. Psychological factors (anxiety, stress, anger, depression, etc.)

## Components of Enriched Lifestyles

### 1. Physical Exercise

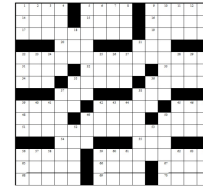
- a. Aerobic exercise:
  - i. improves cardiovascular health and promotes growth and connections among brain cells



- ii. Overall improvement in physical fitness
- iii. Reduces depressive symptoms
- iv. Direct effects on cognition and reduction of dementia symptoms
- b. Exercise is effective
  - i. When it's vigorous and sustained (at least 3x/wk)
  - ii. Even when started later in life
  - iii. For all age groups
  - iv. In some cases, women show stronger benefits

## 2. Mental Activities

- a. "Use it or Lose It"
- b. On average, higher rates of cognitive engagement (education, challenging profession) can delay declines up to 20 yrs later
  - i. Knowledge and expertise provide strong benefits
  - ii. Even starting later in life can promote maintenance of functions
- c. Most training trains specific skills, and there is limited evidence of transfer to everyday activities
  - i. Training in reasoning tasks can show some transfer several years later
- d. Crossword puzzles can delay onset of dementia/decline, but do not slow the rate of decline
- e. Mental activity promotes:
  - i. Maintenance of specific skills
  - ii. Development of new strategies



## 3. Social Engagement

- a. Individuals with richer and more meaningful social networks have less cognitive decline and reduced risk of dementia
- b. The quality matters more than the quantity

## 4. Volunteering

- a. Baltimore, MD Experience Corps
  - i. Involves social, cognitive, and physical elements




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