

Healthy Aging in the Year 2020

September is Healthy Aging Month, and in the year 2020 people are living longer than ever before. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000 there were 35 million people living in the U.S. who were 65 or older. In 2016, this number increased to 49 million and is expected to reach 71 million by 2030 and 98 million by 2060 – when older adults will make up nearly 25% of the population.

In addition to technology and medical advancements, increased education about everyday healthy habits have allowed many adults to still feel young as they reach milestones like 60, 65 and beyond. Years ago, this was not the case. People are retiring later and staying active longer. The goal of Healthy Aging Month is to encourage individuals to act how you feel instead of “acting your age.”

“As people are getting older, they sometimes use their age almost as a crutch and they don’t realize that age is really nothing but a number. It doesn’t matter how old you are. It’s never too late to start taking care of your health, whether that is for exercising, eating healthy, being just more active in general – it’s never too late to start improving your overall health and improving your chronic conditions,” explains Rasha Atallah, M.D., Family Medicine Physician, OSF HealthCare.

An important aspect of getting and staying healthy includes annual visits with your primary care physician (PCP).

This year because of the pandemic, the number of PCP visits in the U.S. declined due to fear of going into a healthcare facility. However, extra measures are being taken to keep offices safe and clean. These visits are important to maintain even when you are feeling otherwise healthy. This helps your doctor get an annual baseline of your health. Furthermore, they will be able to recommend personalized preventative measures to keep you healthy.

“Whether it’s your primary doctor or your specialist – especially now during COVID, during this pandemic, people are obviously afraid to go in. But you want to make sure that you know that all of your doctors are doing the best they can to keep you safe and keep you healthy. And the most important way to do that is to make sure we are up to date and getting regular check-ups,” Dr. Atallah says.

The social aspect of healthy aging is critical as well. While many people may be feeling isolated this year, Dr. Atallah strongly encourages people to utilize the various virtual platforms available to socialize with friends and family. She also recommends finding ways to keep your mind active and sharp. Whether you are working in the office, from home, or are retired, finding tools to exercise your mind is an important part of healthy aging.

“Reading, puzzles, learn a new game. If you have someone who can teach you how to play a new game, you can even play it virtually. You can also do some math. Brush up on those skills. With the grandkids being at home nowadays, maybe join them a little bit. Sit with them. Try to help them with their homework. That might help you to brush up on some of your skills and give you some nice bonding time with the kids and the grandkids,” advises Dr. Atallah.

As winter approaches and the days begin to shorten, Dr. Atallah recommends creating and sticking to a routine. This will play a role in all aspects of your health – physical, mental, and emotional.

“We are going to be more cooped up inside, so we want to make sure that we get into a routine. Have something that wakes you up out of bed, whether it’s getting up to read the paper, getting up to do an exercise, getting up to call somebody. The more of a routine that you have, the less likely that you will feel down or sad or depressed especially when there’s less sunlight outside, less things that we can do in terms of activities with our friends and family,” explains Dr. Atallah.

Most importantly, remember that age is just a number.

“My number one advice to people as they start to age is just to stay motivated. If you are doing something that is working for you, don’t stop. Keep doing it. If there is something that you’ve always wanted to do, know that it’s never too late to start. It’s never too late to change,” says Dr. Atallah.