



## KEYS TO EMBRACING AGING Taking Time for You

Amy F. Hosier, Assistant Professor of Family Sciences, University of Kentucky  
Erin Yelland, Doctoral Student, Family Sciences, University of Kentucky  
LaVona S. Traywick, Associate Professor of Gerontology, University of Arkansas

**Y**ou spend a lifetime making time for others – parenting, caregiving, volunteering and working, but how often do you take a personal timeout? The American Heart Association (2011) recommends making a conscious decision to do at least one thing every day that you enjoy. Taking time for you is good for your mind, body and soul. Follow these tips and aim to spend at least 10 minutes a day on just you.

### GET TO KNOW YOU

What makes you, you? What gets you out of bed in the morning? What is your purpose? To help you answer these questions, think about the things you believe in, the values that guide your life and the passions that motivate you. Have you identified and thought about what is really important to you and what you want to get out of life, including your short-term and long-term goals? Once you answer and/or revisit these questions, gather your thoughts and seek opportunities that fulfill you.

What is your *ikigai*? *Ikigai* is a Japanese concept that translates to “reason for being” or “sense of purpose.” *Ikigai* is a very personal experience, according to Dan Buettner, author of *Blue Zones: Secrets of a Long Life*.

### TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Life is busy. As a result, you may neglect your own well-being, which can lead to stress, irritability, moodiness and even depression. Proper self care, such as sleep, nutrition, physical activity and low stress, can help improve mood and daily productivity. By taking care of yourself, you will be more relaxed and content. You will also feel stronger and more confident. A person who places an emphasis on self care is more efficient, better able to concentrate and help others and will be more likely to accomplish and enjoy more. There are many ways to take care of yourself.

- Sleep
- Exercise
- Eat healthy
- Laugh more
- De-clutter or organize your house and/or office
- Read a book
- Walk your pet
- Play with your kids/grandkids
- Join a club
- Go to your doctor for checkups

## TAKE A BREAK FROM YOUR DAILY ROUTINE WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY

It is mentally healthy to take breaks from life's daily routine and such breaks should not come with guilt. Slipping away from your daily routine doesn't have to occur for extended periods of time. It can mean taking a bath, reading a book uninterrupted or going to your bedroom with your door closed to sit in solitude. Help your family and friends around you understand that this is a time you do not want any interruptions. If it's difficult for people to leave you alone, leave the house and go for a walk, meet a friend for coffee or see a movie.

## MAKE A "TO-DO LIST"

A "to-do list" is a motivating and organizational tool that helps you plan your day and manage your time effectively. Prioritizing your list into due dates, short-term and long-term goals and/or rank of importance can help you feel more control and balance. It also helps you recognize that everything does not have to be accomplished in one day. Crossing items off of a to-do list can be gratifying and empowering because it is a mental reminder that you're making progress. Leave enough room in your day for day-to-day tasks and other unplanned events that naturally appear. If you are feeling down at the end of the day because your list is incomplete, remember that some days are better than others and accept the unfinished to-do list for what it is: an opportunity to finish it tomorrow.

Set an alarm to remind you about "me time." Eventually, it will become a habit that you won't want to break.

## BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

Physical activity and exercise, including strength training, is a healthy way to spend "me time." Exercise affects overall physical and mental well-being. It increases strength, cardiovascular conditioning, flexibility, balance and muscle mass. It also decreases body fat, helps boost self-esteem and confidence and helps lower stress and anxiety. Walking is a great way to get started with an exercise routine, even if it is just around the yard (AHA, 2011). If you already have a regular exercise routine, try something new like joining a yoga or cycling class. Group exercise provides both social and physical stimulation. Children and teens should exercise for approximately one hour per day. Middle-aged and older adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of exercise per week (CDC, 2011).

## EAT SMART AND DRINK WATER

Wholesome, nutritious foods provide you with more energy, combat depression by keeping your brain functioning at its best and prevent numerous other health problems such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancers. Drinking plenty of water will help hydrate your skin and your body. It also flushes toxins out of your body and helps you concentrate. By considering the following recommendations from the USDA's MyPlate program (2011), you can eat for a healthy and more successful future:

- Enjoy your food, but eat less
- Avoid oversized portions
- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables
- Make at least half of your grains whole grains
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks
- Choose food that is low in sodium

## RELAX

Relaxation, the body's natural unwinding technique, has been referred to as the single most important key to health and well-being. As a result of relaxation, you may experience more energy, better sleep, enhanced immunity, increased concentration, problem-solving abilities, greater efficiency, smoother emotions and fewer

physical reactions to stress. Relaxation has also been known to decrease muscle tension and blood pressure and increase blood flow, which is good for the heart (Mayo Clinic, 2011). Relaxation can occur through taking a hot bath, reading a book, getting a massage or taking a few deep breaths (Mayo Clinic, 2011; Kovacs, 2010). Professional methods of relaxation include visual imagery, body awareness and progressive muscle relaxation. Meditation is a form a relaxation. Meditation is a state of peace that occurs when the mind is calm. Meditation helps to reduce stress, depression and anxiety (Allen, 2003). In addition to contributing to a calmer, more peaceful and happier life, meditation can increase creativity and productivity in the workplace or classroom.

## **LAUGH**

It's no joke. Laughter really is the best medicine. Laughter has the ability to increase the "feel good" hormones in the body called endorphins. Laughter boosts the immune system, which contributes to overall healthiness. Finding humor in daily situations can even reduce stress, lower depression and help your mind and body heal (AHA, 2011). With such positive benefits of laughter, make laughing a goal. Laughter is contagious. Watch a funny movie or television show, go to a comedy club, take an impromptu comedy class or simply laugh with a close friend or loved one.

## **JUST SAY NO**

Do you find yourself saying "yes" to everything that is asked of you, even if it is something you really do not want to do? Always saying yes is not healthy. It often overcommits you, which can cause stress and fatigue. Saying no allows you to honor existing obligations and dedicate quality time to those commitments. Saying no to things that you have always done but are tired of doing allows you to try new things. You should not feel guilty saying no, as saying no helps you to focus on what's important.

## **CREATE A BUCKET LIST**

A bucket list can act as a road map for "me time" today and into the future. A bucket list is a list of goals, dreams and life experiences that are important for you to experience within your lifetime. Bucket lists aim to help you maximize every moment of your existence and live your life to the fullest. Bucket lists can be grounding because we too often get caught up in the madness of daily activities and fail to live by personal plans and goals. A bucket list helps you identify purpose and meaning because it provides reminders about what is important in life, what you have done and where you want to go. While bucket lists are often associated with dreams of traveling the world or skydiving, your list should fit your personal goals and dreams no matter how big or small (Grossman and Bly, 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

In today's busy world, you juggle multiple priorities and responsibilities and likely make time for others before making time for yourself. You are important too. Taking time for you – even if it is just for 10 minutes a day – is a healthy lifestyle behavior that influences optimal aging throughout the lifespan.

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