

# Beyond Beauty

Yes, looking as good as you can for as long as you can is a key part of aging beautifully — but we all know if you don't feel good on the inside, too, it doesn't matter how good you look on the outside. True well-being means keeping your mind sharp, your soul happy and your body active despite the stresses of aging. We spoke with wellness experts around the country, and here are six key recommendations they want to share. — *Amy Cassell*

✱ **Change your frame of mind.** If your strategy is to get through life fighting aging, you're going to lose. "We don't use the term 'anti-aging,'" says Lisa DeKoster, director of the Vitality Center at the Vail Mountain Lodge in Colorado. "We say 'aging well' or 'embracing the aging process' because it's a beautiful, natural process and doesn't mean a breakdown in the physical and emotional states of being." Dr. James Nicolai, director of the Andrew Weil, M.D. Integrative Wellness Program at Miraval resort in Tucson, Arizona, agrees. "The most important and central idea we teach here is that aging is not something you fight against — because you're fighting against nature, and you're not going to win," he says.

✱ **Find a balance.** Claudia Dunn, director of Life Balance at the California Health & Longevity Institute, says finding a balance between the energy you expend and the energy you need to replenish your body is often at the cellular root of being tired. "As you age, you need to recognize and limit what zaps your energy," says Dunn. "It becomes important to rest more frequently and at regular intervals. You can't go full steam for a couple of days and say you'll make it up at the end of the week like you did in your 20s." You can find that balance by simply taking more time to listen to your body, getting a full night's rest or signing up for a seminar like those offered at CHLI, which include one-on-one sessions to help you take the best advantage of your time and energy.

✱ **Avoid stress.** "Cortisol — the chronic stress hormone — directly targets places in the brain that kill the nerve cells responsible for your memory," says Nicolai. "So, managing stress has a huge impact on how well we age." Stress relief can be found on many levels: regular spa therapy, acupuncture sessions, yoga classes, meditation or by something as simple as establishing regular breathing patterns. "Your breath is the signal coder to your automatic nervous system, which links feelings of stress and calm," says Nicolai. The next time you're stressed, try this pattern: Inhale for a count of four then exhale for a count of four. The more even and deeper you breathe, the quicker you get to a relaxed state of mind.

✱ **Exercise.** "The more we learn about exercise, the more important it seems to be," says Carstensen. "Not only does it have a huge effect on physical functioning, but it directly relates to cognitive functioning as well. Exercise is associated with improved memory and a slowing of the decline in information processing." The surgeon general recommends two and a half hours of moderate-intensity physical activity per week. DeKoster also stresses that cardio intervals — changing up the speed and intensity of your workouts — are essential to maintaining heart health. "If you're a walker, it's as simple as speeding up your pace then coming back to your normal pace about five or six times during a 25-minute walk," she says.

✱ **Stay social.** A study by the MacArthur Foundation on Aging found there are two factors common in those who age well: maintaining physical activity and keeping up with social interaction. "Studies show that feeling socially isolated is as big of an aging risk factor as cigarette smoking is," says Laura Carstensen, director of the Stanford Center on Longevity and a member of the MacArthur Foundation's Research Network on an Aging Society. Yes, staying in touch with friends on Facebook is fun, but you'll get more benefit by face-to-face interaction. If you find your social circle shrinking as you age (a common problem), make an effort to grow it. Volunteering is a great way to meet people, and when you know people are depending on you to show up, you're more likely to put yourself out there on a regular basis, even when you don't feel like leaving the house.

✱ **Be grateful.** In the battle of optimism versus pessimism, optimism always wins. Numerous studies have shown a link between negative emotions and heart disease. It's not always easy to see the good in things, so Dunn suggests cultivating a state of gratitude by making a gratitude list. "Before you go to bed, write down the three things you're most grateful for," she advises. "Put it next to your bed at eye level so when you wake up in the morning it's one of the first things you see. Before your feet hit the floor, think about those three things for a minute, and let that be the lens of how you see the world."

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