



# How to age well while living long: Keep active and stir your passions

**O**n the road of life, living long and aging well can be two very different journeys.

“The important thing is not longevity as much as quality of life,” says Dr. Robert Levine, a Norwalk, Connecticut-based neurologist, author and retired clinical professor of medicine at Yale University.

In his latest book, “Aging Wisely” (Rowman & Littlefield, \$40), Levine maintains that our physical health is often tied to how we approach life. Simply put, when we feel better about ourselves, we age better, too.

Levine says keeping active and setting goals, especially in retirement, are vital to successful aging because they help keep the brain healthy — what Levine calls maintaining cognitive vitality. “A lot of people retire and they don’t have any passion in life,” he says. “If they do retire, they should find something that really motivates them and keeps them busy.”

Levine stresses the importance of exercise because it not only keeps the body in shape, it also keeps the brain sharp. “New neurons can be grown in the brain simply by exercising, and that enhances memory,” he says. For those

who do not exercise, Levine says it is not too late to start. “Even later in life, you can achieve a lot by starting an exercise program.”

And try to be as independent as possible, he says, even if you are disabled. Do not fall into the habit of relying on loved ones or friends to do even simple tasks that you are capable of doing. “Your self-image is enhanced by doing things for yourself,” he says.

And seek pleasures in life that stir your passion. It could be lunch with friends or moments of peaceful reflection alone. If cooking makes you happy, do it with zest and enthusiasm, even if cooking only for yourself. For those who are retired, a part-time job where you can interact with others can do wonders for your self-esteem. “If you’re not going to get a paying job, volunteer in areas that are going to be stimulating for you,” Levine says.

The more you do, the more you will want to do. But don’t worry that you won’t have time to get everything done. “Be as productive as possible right up to the last moment,” Levine says. “People should die with projects unfinished.”



## AGING WISELY

Strategies for BABY BOOMERS and SENIORS



Robert A. Levine, MD