

The Perks of Growing Older

Retirement doesn't have to be your one-way ticket to a sedentary life. Learn about senior programs and services that can help you stay vital and stimulated.

Your senior years can be one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling times of your life. As the baby boomer generation gets older, the number of senior citizens in the United States is rapidly increasing, and seniors are finding ways to be more active and involved.

There are more seniors today than ever before. In 1900, 3.1 million Americans were age 65 and older; by 1994, this number had grown to 33.2 million. Researchers estimate that by 2030, 20 percent of the U.S. population will be senior citizens.

So what are some of the key trends in this age group?

- **Better economic position.** Thanks to improvements in Social Security and **Medicare**, the number of seniors below the poverty level has dramatically decreased, from 35 percent in the early 1960s to about 10 percent today.
- **Higher education.** More seniors than ever before have completed high school, and it is becoming increasingly common for seniors citizens to have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.
- **Lasting marriages.** The majority of senior citizens younger than 85 are married. Since women tend to live longer than men, older men are twice as likely to be married as elderly women.
- **Longer life expectancy.** People are living longer today than in the past, and the number of people who live until age 100 is growing.

Better Services and Programs for Senior Citizens

In generations past, people felt that old age was a time to take it easy and slow down. But today senior citizens know that staying active is one of the most important parts of **healthy aging**.

Some of the services available to help senior citizens remain vital include:

- **Fitness programs.** A number of local community centers, churches, fitness centers, and senior centers offer **exercise programs specially designed for older adults**. Regular exercise helps you stay functional and healthy.
- **Job placement services.** You don't have to stop working at 65. Senior citizens today are working long after that age, and many people who retire from one job end up going back to work in another capacity. Programs like **Civic Ventures** and the **American Association of Retired Persons WorkSearch program** help older people find ways to get back into the workforce.
- **Volunteer organizations.** An estimated one-third of volunteers in the United States are senior citizens. Volunteering can be a great alternative for your time after retirement. There are many organizations, including the **Experience Corps** and **Senior Corps**, with programs that help match senior citizens to volunteer opportunities.

- **Lifelong education.** Staying mentally active is an important part of healthy aging, since researchers are finding out that when it comes to your mind, you have to use it so you don't lose it. One way you can stay mentally challenged as you grow older is to enroll in adult education courses. Ask your local college, university, or public library if they offer education programs especially for seniors.
- **Travel programs.** Retirement is a great time to explore the world through travel. The **Elderhostel Institute Network** is a program that provides travel opportunities for people age 55 and older. The U.S. Department of the Interior offers U.S. citizens 62 and older a **Senior Pass**, with lifetime access to government-recognized recreation areas for just \$10.
- **Senior discounts.** In addition to the Senior Pass, there are numerous senior citizens discount programs everywhere. If you are a member of AARP, for instance, you can save up to 60 percent when you shop online at the **Everyday Savings Center**, which features retailers like Target and Sony Electronics. In addition, many local movie theaters, museums, and restaurants often offer discounted rates for seniors. Ask around to find out what kinds of senior discounts are available in your area.

One of the best ways to stay in good mental and physical shape as you age is to get out and enjoy yourself. Take advantage of the programs and services offered to senior citizens so you can **make the most of life**.

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