



# Senior Living

# Dealing with Ageism

Ageism, or discrimination based on age, is an often-overlooked form of prejudice that affects millions of older adults around the world.

From subtle assumptions about seniors' abilities to overtly negative stereotypes, ageism can manifest in various ways, affecting everything from employment opportunities to health care treatments. Fortunately, awareness and proactive strategies can help identify and combat ageism, helping you maintain your dignity, confidence and sense of purpose.

Ageism refers to stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed toward individuals or groups based on their age. It often takes the form of societal assumptions that older adults are less capable, slower or out of touch. This prejudice can occur in the workplace, health care settings and even in personal relationships. For example, older workers may face challenges in finding jobs or advancing in their careers because of assumptions that they are "too old" to learn new skills or be productive. In health care, doctors might dismiss a senior's concerns as "normal aging," ignoring legitimate medical issues.

In popular culture, ageist views are reinforced through portrayals of seniors as frail,



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forgetful or out of touch with modern technology. These stereotypes can erode self-confidence, leading many older adults to internalize these negative messages, which can diminish their quality of life.

## FACTS ABOUT AGEISM

Ageism in the workplace is far too common. Two-thirds of workers 45 and older have seen or experienced age discrimination. According to AARP surveys, 16% of respondents say they didn't get the job they applied for, 12% said they were passed over for a promotion and 7% report being fired due

to age discrimination. Even more telling, 91% of the respondents said they thought age discrimination was common.

It's only gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 20,000 age discrimination cases were filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2020 and age discrimination cases account for 20-25% of all their cases.

## COMBATING AGEISM

There are ways to push back. The first step is recognizing ageism when it occurs. Whether it's an offhand

comment, an assumption about your abilities or unequal treatment at work or in public, identifying ageist behavior lets you strategize how to respond.

Assert your capabilities. Staying active, engaged and open to learning new skills can help dispel stereotypes. For instance, enrolling in a class to learn a new technology or hobby not only combats the stereotype that seniors can't adapt but also promotes personal growth and confidence.

Another strategy is to build and maintain intergenerational relationships. Engaging with younger generations helps

break down barriers and demonstrates that wisdom, experience and adaptability come with age. These relationships foster mutual respect and understanding, helping to dispel misconceptions about aging.

Advocacy is a powerful tool. Seniors can advocate for themselves by speaking up when they encounter discriminatory behavior or policies. They can join organizations that fight for senior rights, promoting awareness and encouraging legislative changes to protect against age-based discrimination.

# Staying Safe on the Road

Driving represents independence and freedom. It allows you to stay connected with family and friends, run errands and continue participating in community activities.

However, as we age, physical and cognitive changes can affect our ability to drive safely. The key is recognizing when adjustments are needed and understanding how to maintain safety behind the wheel.

## PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE CHANGES

Aging naturally brings physical changes that affect driving. For instance, vision tends to weaken over time, making it harder to see clearly at night, read road signs or recognize obstacles in the distance. If you wear glasses, make sure your prescription is up to date, and consider avoiding nighttime driving if it becomes difficult to see in the dark.

Hearing loss can also affect driving, as you may miss important auditory cues like sirens or horns. If you use hearing aids, ensure they're functioning well while you drive and be extra cautious in areas with heavy pedestrian traffic.

Physical changes, such as arthritis or weakened muscles, can reduce your ability to grip



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the steering wheel, turn your head or make quick movements. A car with features like power steering, large mirrors and a backup camera can make driving easier.

Cognitively, reaction times tend to slow as we age. You may notice it takes longer to

process complex driving situations, like merging onto a busy highway or navigating a new area. If you're experiencing slower reflexes or cognitive decline, driving shorter distances and sticking to familiar routes can reduce stress and enhance safety.

## TIPS FOR SAFE DRIVING

Schedule regular health check-ups to ensure that you're fit to drive. Keep an open dialogue with your doctor about any concerns that could affect your driving, and be proactive about managing conditions like arthritis, diabetes or heart

disease.

Taking a defensive driving course specifically for seniors can be helpful. Many insurance companies offer discounts for completing these programs, which are designed to refresh your knowledge of road safety and address the challenges older drivers may face.

Keep your vehicle in good condition. Ensure regular maintenance is done, including checking your tires, brakes and lights. A car with advanced safety features like automatic braking, lane departure warnings and blind-spot detection can provide an extra layer of security.

## KNOWING WHEN TO STEP BACK

Deciding to stop driving is a deeply personal choice, but there may come a time when you'll need to hang up the keys and it is better to make that decision yourself than have someone make it for you. If you find yourself feeling anxious, getting lost more frequently or having close calls, it may be time to consider other transportation options. Ride-sharing services, public transportation and community shuttles are all great alternatives that can help maintain your independence.

Driving in your golden years can still be a safe and enjoyable experience with proper preparation and self-awareness. Taking precautions can let you continue to enjoy the freedom of the road well into your senior years.

# Malnutrition in Older Adults

Malnutrition is a serious concern for older adults.

Aside from food insecurity caused by poverty, malnutrition can come about because of many reasons, including physiological and psychosocial factors. In fact, even people with high incomes can suffer malnutrition because they fail to recognize changing physical conditions.

For example, there is a natural decline in taste and smell as one ages. Food may not have the same level of enjoyment that it used to have because the taste or smell seems “off.” This leads to a reduced interest in eating and, sometimes, an insufficient nutrient intake.

Medication side effects, which are common in older adults managing multiple conditions, can affect appetite and digestion. For example, some medications cause nausea or a dry mouth, both of which can diminish the desire to eat.

Oral health can cause issues. Dental problems such as missing teeth, gum disease or poorly fitting dentures can make chewing difficult and uncomfortable. This can lead to avoiding certain foods, particularly those that are harder to chew, like fruits, vegetables and proteins. Unfortunately, this avoidance can result in a diet lacking essential nutrients, particularly protein, which is vital for maintaining muscle mass and promoting healing in the body.



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Mobility issues further complicate the situation. Many older adults may struggle to shop for groceries or prepare meals due to limited mobility or physical weakness. This can lead to reliance on convenience foods, which are often less nutritious, or skipping meals altogether.

Social isolation also plays a role, as eating alone can diminish the motivation to prepare and consume healthy meals. This is particularly common in older adults who live alone or have lost a spouse

or close friends.

How do you know if you or a loved one is experiencing malnutrition? The Neighbors of Dunn County list the following signs: unintentional weight loss, fatigue or weakness, loss of appetite, cognitive changes, and delayed wound healing.

To combat malnutrition, seniors and caregivers can take several proactive steps. First, regular dental check-ups and addressing any oral health issues can make eating more comfortable and enjoyable.

Secondly, modifying meals to include soft, nutrient-dense foods, like smoothies or soups rich in protein and vegetables, can help seniors maintain proper nutrition without discomfort.

Social engagement during meals contributes to better habits. Encouraging seniors to eat with others, whether through community meal programs or family gatherings, can make the experience more enjoyable and increase food intake. Additionally, caregivers and healthcare providers

should monitor medication side effects and adjust dietary plans as needed to accommodate changing appetites or digestive issues.

Finally, addressing mobility concerns by arranging grocery delivery services or preparing meals in advance can help ensure seniors have consistent access to nutritious foods. With proper attention and care, the risks of malnutrition can be significantly reduced, allowing older adults to maintain better health and quality of life.

# Unlocking Intellectual Gains

Older minds are far sharper than most people have been led to believe.

With an overload of commercials warning of memory loss and trying to sell seniors a wide range of gadgets, pills, exercise regimes, puzzles and games, it's no surprise that people get a little scared about intellectual decline.

However, it is nowhere near as bleak as it seems. There's even some research showing that growing older offers intellectual gains.

Gerontologist Christina Pierpaoli Parker notes in an interview with "The Next Big Idea" website: "Even though there are these losses in certain domains, we have to recognize that there are gains. Cognitively, for example, older adults will school you in terms of crystallized intelligence, in terms of understanding the world, facts, semantics, wisdom, experience, vocabulary. There's no competing with older adults there."

This crystallized intelligence is one of the key intellectual advantages that older adults gain over time, highlighting their deepened understanding of the world and enhanced problem-solving abilities.

## GROWTH OF CRYSTALLIZED INTELLIGENCE

Crystallized intelligence refers to the knowledge and experience accumulated over a lifetime. This encompasses language skills, general knowledge, wisdom and the ability to make decisions based on long-term experience.

Unlike fluid intelligence, which involves problem-solving in novel situations and tends to decline with age, crystallized intelligence improves as one grows older. This means that while



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older adults might face challenges in recalling new information, their ability to make sound decisions and provide insight, wisdom and perspective remains sharp and often exceeds that of younger individuals.

## WISDOM AND DECISION-MAKING

As people age, their ability to process complex life situations improves, often leading to better decision-making. The depth of experience older adults bring to the table allows them to approach problems with a level of nuance and understanding that younger generations may not yet have developed.

Wisdom, which is strongly linked to crystallized intelligence, can play a

significant role in guiding others, mentoring and offering perspective in various settings.

A 1986 study by William Hoyer confirmed that older adults are good at encapsulation — they become increasingly competent in problem-solving in their chosen fields. As long as an adult is healthy, they can continue to gain expertise, even while they are somewhat less competent in solving problems outside their specialty.

In other words, while younger people are better at gaining new knowledge, older adults are better at refining existing knowledge and applying them to real-life situation.

## CULTIVATING MENTAL ABILITIES

Engaging in intellectual hobbies,

such as reading, learning a new language or tackling puzzles, can help keep the brain active.

Social interaction is another vital aspect of mental well-being. Staying connected with others, whether through group activities, volunteer work or maintaining a strong network of friends, can help combat cognitive decline. Continued learning is a powerful tool in maintaining cognitive health.

Aging presents challenges, particularly in terms of fluid intelligence, but it brings immense intellectual rewards. No matter what common prejudices imply, older adults can continue to thrive cognitively and offer unmatched wisdom to those around them.

# Adopting a Pet as a Senior

The older one gets, the greater the danger of loneliness. It's why many people turn to pets for companionship and emotional support.

Half of adults over 50 having at least one pet, according to Frontiers in Public Health, and research indicates that pet ownership helps older adults improve their quality of life, experience less depression and even experience physical health benefits.

However, there are many factors that go into determining whether pet adoption is the right choice for any given person. First, assess your living situation. If you live in a senior community or assisted living facility, find out whether pets are allowed and whether there are any restrictions on the type or size of animals.

Think about the space in your home and whether it's suitable for the type of pet you're considering. For example, large dogs may require more room and exercise than you can comfortably provide, whereas a smaller dog, cat, or even a low-maintenance pet like a bird or fish might be a better match.

Your physical health and mobility influences whether pet ownership is a good choice. While pets can encourage you to stay active,



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larger, more energetic animals may need daily walks or playtime that could be strenuous. If mobility is an issue, consider a smaller, less active pet or even adopting an older animal with lower energy levels.

Think about the long-term

commitment. Pets like dogs and cats can live for 10-20 years. If you're concerned about being able to care for a pet long-term, talk to family members or friends who could provide care in the future. Some shelters offer adoption programs

specifically for seniors that match them with older pets, which can be a more manageable commitment.

Likewise, fostering pets may be a good choice as it is a shorter-term commitment, though it can be heartbreaking at times.

## BENEFITS OF PET OWNERSHIP

The benefits of owning a pet as a senior are significant. Pets provide companionship and reduce feelings of loneliness, which is especially important for those living alone. Studies have shown that pet owners experience lower blood pressure, reduced stress levels and even improved mental health.

Daily routines, like feeding and walking your pet, can give a sense of purpose and structure to the day. Emotional benefits are profound, as pets offer unconditional love and affection, which can enhance emotional well-being.

Additionally, pets can help seniors stay physically active, especially dogs, which need regular walks. This exercise can improve cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles and boost mood.

## CHALLENGES

While the benefits are numerous, there are some challenges. Pets, especially young or high-energy ones, require time, attention and potentially costly veterinary care. You'll need to budget for food, grooming and routine health check-ups. If you're on a limited or low income, these expenses can add up.

Pets can also be unpredictable, especially younger ones, and may require training or special care. Some find this overwhelming. To minimize challenges, consider adopting an older, trained pet whose temperament is well-suited to your lifestyle.

# The Benefits of Dancing

You don't have to be young to be a dancing fool.

Moving one's body and getting down to music is fun for all ages — and it offers numerous physical, mental and social benefits for seniors.

And it isn't just line or ballroom dancing that appeals to older folks (though those can continue to be fun no matter what your age). Even ballet, one of the more technically and physically demanding forms of dance, has its older practitioners. Doreen Peaches started dancing at age 61 and became the oldest person to pass the Royal Academy of Dance's Grade 6 exam when she was 71. Eileen Kramer is an Australian dancer, choreographer and artist who celebrated her 109th birthday in 2023 and is still dancing, having last made a video in 2022.

## BENEFITS

Dancing helps improve cardiovascular health, flexibility, balance and coordination. The rhythmic movements and light aerobic exercise of styles like ballroom or folk dancing can strengthen muscles and joints without causing strain.

Regular participation in dance can help maintain mobility, reduce the risk of falls, and even aid in managing chronic conditions like arthritis or diabetes.

Memorizing steps and routines stimulates cognitive



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function and memory, which may help stave off age-related mental decline. Engaging in dance releases endorphins, improving mood and reducing symptoms of anxiety or depression. Group dancing creates a sense of community and belonging.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF DANCE

**Ballroom:** Styles like the waltz, foxtrot and tango offer a combination of gentle aerobic movement and social interaction, making them ideal for older adults. Ballroom dancing

is often done in pairs, promoting connection and teamwork, and the relatively slow pace makes it accessible for all fitness levels.

**Line:** Line dancing involves a group of people following a choreographed sequence of steps to a wide variety of music. It requires no partner, is slower-paced and fosters social interaction. It's especially popular in senior centers and community events.

**Zumba Gold:** A modified version of the energetic Latin-inspired Zumba workout, Zumba Gold is designed for

seniors. It combines easy-to-follow moves with upbeat music to create a fun, low-impact workout.

However, you know your limits and interests best. Don't be afraid to pursue other forms of dance if you (and your doctor) think you are up to it. Perhaps now is the time to learn tap, hip hop, jazz, salsa or ballet dancing.

## STAYING INVOLVED AS YOU AGE

Even as physical limitations arise, there are still ways to enjoy dancing. Many studios

offer adaptive classes that focus on chair dancing or reduced-impact movements. Senior centers, community groups and online platforms often provide dance lessons tailored to older adults, ensuring there's always a way to stay engaged.

Silver Sneakers offers dance classes and there are online dance party workouts for seniors.

Whether it's for fitness, social connection or simply joy, dancing is a wonderful way to stay active and have fun. It's never too late to start dancing!

# Adventure at National Parks

Exploring the great outdoors is a rewarding and enriching experience for people of all ages, and for seniors, it's a chance to reconnect with nature, stay active and create lasting memories.

In 2016, a Nielsen survey reported that 63% of Americans believed that spending time outdoors could help them live a longer, healthier life.

The U.S. National Park Service offers a fantastic opportunity for senior citizens to enjoy the wonders of these protected landscapes through the Senior Pass, making it easier and more affordable to access the country's natural treasures.

## THE SENIOR PASS

For U.S. citizens and permanent residents aged 62 or older, the Senior Pass offers an excellent deal. It grants access to more than 2,000 recreation sites managed by federal agencies such as the National Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management. The annual pass costs \$20 and is valid for one year. A life-time pass costs \$80.

Both passes allow the pass holder and passengers in a single, non-commercial vehicle to enter national parks and federal recreation areas.

In addition, the pass offers discounts on amenities like camping, swimming and boat launching at many locations. The Senior Pass can be obtained at national parks, online, or via mail.

## POPULAR NATIONAL PARKS

Many national parks offer easy-to-



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navigate trails, accessible visitor centers and programs that cater to older adults.

Here are a few parks that are

particularly popular among senior visitors:

**Grand Canyon National Park (Arizona).** With its breathtaking views

and scenic overlooks, the Grand Canyon offers accessible viewpoints along the South Rim, and there are shuttle services for visitors who prefer not to hike.

**Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming, Montana, Idaho).** Known for its geysers and hot springs, Yellowstone features numerous drive-through loops, making it easy for seniors to explore its wonders without extensive walking.

**Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Tennessee, North Carolina).** This park has gentle hiking trails, rich biodiversity and several scenic drives that showcase the beautiful Appalachian landscape.

**Yosemite National Park (California).** Yosemite provides wheelchair-accessible trails and shuttles, making it ideal for seniors looking to enjoy its famous waterfalls and granite cliffs.

**Everglades National Park (Florida).** Seniors can enjoy wildlife watching, flat walking paths and boat tours, providing ample opportunity to take in the unique ecosystem without strenuous activity.

## WHY NATIONAL PARKS?

There are 424 National Parks that can be found in all 50 states and many U.S. territories.

In 2012, the National Park Service formed a task force committed to providing access to the parks for a wider range of visitors. This included providing wheelchair access, water fountains, sign language interpreters and closed-captioned tours and visitor centers.

Download the NPS app to get updated accessibility information for facilities and trails. They also offer an interactive map that is a guide to accessibility features at each National Park.