

A photograph of an elderly couple, a man and a woman, laughing together while sitting in a red hammock. The man, on the left, has a beard and glasses, wearing a plaid shirt. The woman, on the right, has short grey hair and is wearing a blue and white patterned top. They are outdoors on a grassy lawn with fallen leaves. The image is framed by a thick black border.

Senior  
Living

# Climate Change and Older Adults

Climate change has been a hot topic for discussion for years now and more than ever, older adults are starting to feel the effects.

From extreme heat to severe storms and prolonged power failures, changing weather patterns are shaping daily life and health risks for seniors across the country.

According to the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, 74% of people age 50 and older experienced at least one extreme weather event in the past two years. These events included extreme heat, poor air quality from wildfires, severe storms and long power failures. For many seniors, these disruptions are not rare occurrences but part of an emerging pattern.

## HOW EXTREME WEATHER AFFECTS SENIOR HEALTH

Extreme weather events can affect health in both direct and indirect ways. Heat waves increase the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, particularly for older adults who may have chronic conditions or take medications that affect temperature regulation. Poor air quality from wildfires or pollution can worsen respiratory and cardiovascular



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conditions.

Severe storms and power failures can interrupt access to medical equipment, refrigeration for medications and reliable transportation. Flooding and infrastructure damage may limit access to clean water, nutritious food and health care services. These disruptions can be especially challenging for seniors who

rely on regular routines or outside assistance.

The poll found that a majority of older adults are already concerned about these risks. Nearly six in 10 respondents, or 59%, said they are concerned about the effect of climate change on their own health. Even more, 74%, expressed concern about the health of future generations.

## INFORMATION GAPS, PREPAREDNESS CHALLENGES

Despite growing concern, many seniors feel underinformed. The University of Michigan poll reported 27% of adults age 50 and older said they do not have enough reliable information about how climate change affects their health. Another 28% said they

were unsure. This lack of clarity can make it harder to prepare for emergencies or recognize health risks related to extreme weather.

Health care providers could play a stronger role, but conversations remain limited. Only 6% of older adults said a health care provider had talked with them about preparing for climate-related health emergencies. However, among those who had that conversation, 64% took action as a result, suggesting that guidance can make a meaningful difference.

According to the poll, older adults rely on the following sources for news about climate change: 54% on television or radio, 41% on newspapers/magazines/journals, 22% on social media, 20% on family or friends, 9% on a health care providers, and 12% on other sources.

## STEPS TOWARD RESILIENCE AND AWARENESS

While climate change presents real challenges, preparation can reduce risk. Staying informed about local weather alerts, creating emergency plans and identifying cooling or clean-air spaces are practical steps. Seniors can also talk with health care providers about how medications or conditions may interact with extreme heat or poor air quality.

Climate change is not an abstract issue for older adults. It is a present-day health concern that affects safety, independence and quality of life.

# Celebrating Cultural Curiosity

Curiosity does not fade with age. For many older adults, it deepens, shaped by decades of experience and a growing appreciation for the wider world.

Exploring art, history, food and traditions offers seniors a powerful pathway to lifelong learning, meaningful connection and renewed vitality.

Cultural curiosity is not about mastering new subjects or traveling far from home. It is about remaining open to ideas, stories and experiences that broaden perspective and spark joy. Whether through a museum visit, a shared meal or a new tradition, engaging with culture keeps the mind active and the heart connected.

## LEARNING THROUGH ART AND HISTORY

Art and history invite reflection, conversation and discovery. Visiting galleries, attending performances or exploring historical sites can awaken memories while offering new ways to see the world. Many cultural institutions provide senior-friendly programming, virtual tours and discussion groups that make participation accessible and social.

Learning does not require formal study. Reading historical fiction, watching documentaries or listening to lectures can deepen understanding at a comfortable pace. Even revisiting familiar eras or artistic styles can reveal fresh insights when viewed through the lens of lived experience.

Engaging with culture supports cognitive health. Research shows that activities involving interpretation, analysis and storytelling help stimulate the brain and encourage curiosity.



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Discussing what one has seen or learned with others adds an important social dimension to the experience.

## FOOD AS A GATEWAY TO CONNECTION

Food is one of the most approachable ways to explore culture. Trying new cuisines, learning family recipes or attending cultural food festivals can create opportunities for shared enjoyment and conversation. Meals often carry stories, traditions and memories that connect generations.

Cooking and eating together fosters social bonds while celebrating diversity. Hosting a themed dinner,

participating in a community potluck or taking a cooking class can transform everyday meals into meaningful cultural experiences. For seniors living alone, food-focused activities offer a welcoming way to connect with others.

Cultural curiosity through food encourages mindfulness. Paying attention to flavors, textures and traditions brings a sense of presence that enhances enjoyment and appreciation.

## TRADITIONS BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Exploring traditions, whether familiar

or new, helps build understanding and connection. Cultural celebrations, music, storytelling and rituals offer opportunities to participate in something larger than oneself. Attending festivals, joining cultural organizations or volunteering at community events allows seniors to stay engaged and socially active.

Sharing one's own traditions is equally meaningful. Passing down stories, crafts or holiday customs honors personal history while inviting others into that experience. These exchanges strengthen relationships and create mutual respect across cultures and generations.

# Health Care Companions

Health care appointments can be overwhelming at any age, but for many older adults, they come with added complexity.

New diagnoses, multiple medications and unfamiliar terminology can make it hard to absorb everything discussed in a short visit. That is why more seniors are choosing not to go it alone. Bringing a trusted companion to medical appointments is becoming an important part of navigating care.

According to the University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, 38% of adults age 50 and older had someone attend their health care appointments with them in the past year. Most commonly, the person was there to provide company or help ask and answer questions. The results highlight how valuable shared support can be in medical settings.

## WHY HAVING SOMEONE THERE HELPS

Appointments often move quickly, and it can be difficult to process information in real time. A companion can listen closely, take notes and help clarify instructions. They may notice details that the patient misses or remember questions discussed ahead of time.

The same poll found that



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92% of older adults who brought someone with them to a health care appointment agreed the presence of another person was helpful. That overwhelming agreement reflects more than just practical assistance. Emotional support also plays a role. Simply having someone there can ease anxiety and help patients feel more confident speaking up.

Companions can also help bridge communication gaps. They may ask follow-up questions, request clearer explanations or help restate concerns in ways clinicians can address. This can lead to better

understanding and more informed decision-making.

## SUPPORTING OTHERS THROUGH SHARED CARE

Health care companionship is not one-sided. The University of Michigan poll found 34% of adults age 50 and older attended the health care appointments of another person age 50 and older in the past year. In these cases, companions most often helped ask or answer questions or assisted with understanding medical advice.

This shared approach to care reflects strong social ties among

older adults. Spouses, siblings, adult children and close friends often take turns supporting one another, especially when managing chronic conditions or complex treatment plans.

For companions, attending appointments can provide reassurance. Hearing information directly from a provider reduces confusion and helps everyone stay on the same page when it comes to care decisions and next steps.

## MAKING THE MOST OF A HEALTH CARE COMPANION

To be effective, companions

should be chosen thoughtfully. Trust, good communication and respect for privacy are key. It helps to discuss goals ahead of time, such as what questions to ask or what information to focus on.

According to the poll, adults said having another person at their appointments improved their experience. Specifically: 92% said it was helpful, 83% said it helped them feel comfortable sharing their health information, 79% said it helped them follow through on the provider's instructions and 76% said it positively affected the quality of care they received.

# Mindful Technology Use

Technology is everywhere.

It's the way we stay in touch with family, manage our appointments, explore hobbies, control our environment, play games and track medication.

Digital tools can offer connection and convenience. At the same time, too much screen time or poorly chosen technology habits can leave people feeling distracted, frustrated or fatigued. Mindful technology use focuses on balance, intention and well-being.

Rather than asking whether technology is good or bad, the more useful question is how it fits into daily life. When used thoughtfully, digital tools can support independence, learning and social engagement without overwhelming the senses or replacing meaningful offline experiences.

## USING TECHNOLOGY WITH PURPOSE

Mindful technology use begins with clarity. Knowing why you are using a device helps prevent endless scrolling or digital overload. Technology works best when it serves a specific purpose, such as connecting with loved ones, accessing information or supporting health needs.

Video calls and messaging apps can help maintain relationships across distances, especially for seniors who live alone or far from family. Online classes, museum tours and discussion groups make it possible to explore interests and continue learning from home. Health portals and reminder apps can simplify medication schedules and appointments when used



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selectively.

It can be helpful to periodically review which apps and services are truly useful. Removing rarely used or stressful applications can reduce clutter and make devices easier and more pleasant to use.

## SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES WITH SCREENS

Spending long periods in front of screens can strain eyes, disrupt sleep and reduce physical activity. Creating gentle boundaries helps technology remain a tool rather than a drain.

Designating screen-free times, such as during meals or before bedtime, can support better sleep and more present conversations. Adjusting font sizes, brightness and sound settings can

reduce physical discomfort and make devices more accessible. Short breaks from screens throughout the day encourage movement and mental rest. Even brief pauses to stretch, step outside or change activities can restore focus and energy.

## TECHNOLOGY THAT SUPPORTS WELL-BEING

Not all technology use is passive. Many digital tools actively promote well-being when used intentionally. Fitness trackers, meditation apps and guided exercise programs can support physical and mental health. Audio-books and podcasts provide stimulation without requiring prolonged screen use.

Technology can enhance safety and

independence. Navigation tools, ride-hailing apps and emergency alert features can make it easier to get around and feel secure while staying connected.

Learning new digital skills can be empowering at any age. Community classes, libraries and senior centers often offer low-pressure opportunities to build confidence with technology.

Mindful technology use is not about keeping up with every new trend. It is about choosing tools that align with personal values and support a full, balanced life. When technology enhances connection, curiosity and independence without overwhelming daily routines, it becomes a quiet partner in well-being rather than a constant distraction.

# Nutrition for Energy

For many older adults, nutrition advice can start to feel repetitive: Eat less, avoid this, limit that.

While managing health conditions matters, food can be a powerful source of energy, pleasure and connection. Shifting the focus from restriction to nourishment can help seniors feel more vibrant and engaged in daily life.

Eating well is not just about preventing illness. It is about fueling the body for movement, conversation, creativity and enjoyment. When meals are satisfying and supportive, they become something to look forward to rather than another task to manage.

## FUELING STAMINA

One common nutrition-related complaint among seniors is low energy. Skipped meals, overly restrictive diets and inadequate protein intake can all contribute to fatigue. Building meals around steady sources of fuel helps support stamina from morning through evening.

Protein plays a key role in maintaining muscle strength and endurance. Including foods such as eggs, yogurt, beans, fish, poultry or nut butters at each meal can help prevent energy dips. Pairing protein with complex carbohydrates like whole grains, fruits and vegetables provides longer-lasting fuel than refined



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sugars alone.

Healthy fats matter. Olive oil, avocados and nuts support satiety and sustained energy while adding flavor and texture. Staying hydrated is equally important, as even mild dehydration can lead to sluggishness and headaches. Water, herbal teas and foods with high water content can all help meet daily fluid needs.

## BRINGING ENJOYMENT BACK TO THE TABLE

Nutrition works best when food is enjoyable. Taste changes and appetite shifts can

occur with age, but meals don't have to be bland or boring. Using herbs, spices and varied textures can revive interest in eating and make meals more satisfying.

Enjoyment can come from flexibility. Allowing room for favorite foods, cultural traditions and occasional indulgences supports a healthier relationship with food. Eating ought to feel nourishing rather than punitive.

Cooking does not have to be complicated to be satisfying. Simple meals prepared with care can provide comfort and

pleasure without requiring hours in the kitchen. For those who find cooking challenging, meal kits, community meals and shared cooking arrangements can help maintain variety and interest.

## NUTRITION AS A SOCIAL CONNECTOR

Meals are often the center of social life. Sharing food with others encourages regular eating, sparks conversation and reduces isolation. Whether it is a weekly breakfast with friends, a potluck at a community center or cooking with

grandchildren, food can be a powerful way to stay connected.

Planning meals around social activities can boost motivation to eat well. When food becomes part of a shared experience, it supports both physical energy and emotional well-being.

Nutrition that supports energy is not about perfection. It is about choosing foods that help seniors feel strong, satisfied and engaged in the life they want to live. When meals nourish both body and spirit, energy often follows.

# Senior Living Options

For many people, the phrase senior living still brings to mind traditional nursing homes.

In reality, today's older adults have a wide range of living options designed to support independence, safety and quality of life at every stage.

Understanding the differences among these choices can help individuals and families make informed decisions that align with personal needs and preferences.

Modern senior living emphasizes flexibility and choice. Communities are designed not just to provide care but to support active, engaged lifestyles while offering varying levels of assistance as needs change.

## INDEPENDENT AND ACTIVE SENIOR LIVING

Independent living communities are designed for older adults who do not need daily medical care or personal assistance. Residents typically live in private apartments or cottages and enjoy amenities such as dining services, fitness centers, transportation and social programming. These communities focus on convenience, connection and maintenance-free living.

Active senior communities, sometimes called 55-plus communities, are geared toward healthy, independent adults who want a lifestyle centered on recreation and social



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engagement. These neighborhoods often feature fitness classes, clubs, walking trails and organized activities but do not provide on-site personal care or medical services.

Both options emphasize autonomy and community, making them appealing to seniors who want to simplify daily responsibilities without giving up independence.

## ASSISTED LIVING AND MEMORY CARE

Assisted living communities support residents who need help with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, medication management or meal preparation. Residents

maintain private living spaces while having access to staff support and structured services. Assisted living bridges the gap between independent living and more intensive care.

Memory care is a specialized form of assisted living designed for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. These communities offer secure environments, specially trained staff and programming tailored to cognitive needs. Layouts, routines and activities are designed to reduce confusion and promote comfort and safety.

Memory care focuses on dignity, structure and individualized support while

encouraging engagement at an appropriate level.

## CO-HOUSING AND CONTINUING CARE OPTIONS

Senior co-housing is a community model in which residents live in private homes while sharing common spaces and responsibilities. These communities are often self-governed and emphasize collaboration, mutual support and social connection. Co-housing appeals to seniors who value independence but want strong neighborly ties.

Continuing care retirement communities, or CCRCs, offer multiple levels of care within

one campus. Residents may start in independent living and transition to assisted living, memory care or skilled nursing as needs evolve. This model provides long-term planning and continuity while reducing the need for future moves.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT FIT

No single option fits everyone. Health needs, lifestyle preferences, finances and desired level of independence all play a role in choosing a senior living arrangement. The good news is today's choices reflect a broader understanding of aging as an active, evolving stage of life.

# Tech-Forward Companionship

Loneliness and social isolation are growing concerns for older adults, especially for those living alone or managing health limitations.

At the same time, technology is evolving in ways that go far beyond convenience. Artificial intelligence is beginning to offer new forms of companionship, support and engagement that can meaningfully enhance daily life for seniors when used thoughtfully.

Tech-forward companionship does not replace human relationships. Instead, it supplements them, providing connection, stimulation and reassurance during moments when people may otherwise feel alone or unsupported.

According to a University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, the use of AI among seniors has become increasingly common — 55% of people age 50 and older use AI for purposes such as health information and social connection. Of those who use AI-powered home security devices and systems, 96% said the devices help them live independently and safely in their homes. The percentage is at 80% for those who use AI-powered voice assistants.

However, there are still some reservations. Almost all — 92% of adults — said they



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want to know whether the information they receive is from a person or is AI-generated and 81% want to learn more about the risks of AI. A full 46% of older adults say that they have little to no trust in AI-generated information.

Commonly used AI technology include Amazon's Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant, ChatGPT, Gemini or Copilot. Seniors report using them for entertainment (37%), to receive non-health

information (30%), to receive health information (30%), for social connection (12%), to create text or images (11%) or to plan an activity (9%).

## HOW AI SUPPORTS DAILY CONNECTION

AI-powered tools are increasingly designed to interact in natural, conversational ways. Voice-activated assistants can answer questions, share news, play music or tell stories, offering a sense

of presence throughout the day. For seniors who spend long hours at home, these interactions can add structure and reduce feelings of isolation.

Some AI platforms are designed specifically to provide companionship, engaging users in conversation, games or memory prompts. These tools can adapt to personal interests and routines, making interactions feel familiar and

personalized over time. For individuals who are hesitant to burden family members with frequent calls, AI offers a low-pressure way to stay mentally and socially engaged.

Technology can help maintain human connections. AI-enhanced communication tools make video calls easier to initiate, translate messages across languages and assist those with hearing or vision challenges. These features remove barriers that might otherwise limit social interaction.

## SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Beyond companionship, AI plays a growing role in supporting independence. Smart home systems can monitor daily patterns, remind users to take medications or alert caregivers if something seems amiss. These tools offer peace of mind while allowing seniors to remain in their homes longer.

AI-driven wellness apps can guide relaxation exercises, track mood changes or suggest activities based on energy levels. For seniors managing anxiety, grief or life transitions, these gentle prompts can encourage emotional self-awareness and self-care. Importantly, many of these technologies are designed to learn preferences over time. The more they are used, the better they can tailor support, making daily routines smoother and less stressful.